

EARLY JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN HERMENEUTIC
OF GENESIS 18, 1-16 AND 32, 23-33

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
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CHAPTER

I. EARLY JEWISH HERMENEUTIC OF GENESIS 18, 1-16	7
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Ancient Versions and Targums	16
1. Traditions About the Location	23
2. Abraham's Situation	24
3. The Day and the Hour	30
4. The Participants	33
5. Preparing the Bread	42
6. Preparing the Meat	47
7. The Merits of Abraham	53
8. Did They Consume the Meal?	61
9. The Whereabouts of Sarah	65
10. Puncta Extraordinaria	67
11. The Promise of a Son	69
12. The Promise Overheard	73
13. The Old Age of Abraham and Sarah	75
14. In Praise of Peace	80
15. Reprimand and Reassurance	82
16. The Departure	84
Conclusions	86

II. EARLY CHRISTIAN AND ALEXANDRIAN JEWISH HERMENEUTIC OF GENESIS 18, 1-16.	96
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A. Early Greek and Latin Apologists	107
B. Alexandrian Hermeneutics	123
C. Later Eastern Writers	155
D. Antiochean Hermeneutics	159
E. Western Writers through Augustine	176
F. Western Writers after Augustine	195
Excursus: Related Art Works	204
Conclusions	211

III. EARLY JEWISH HERMENEUTIC OF GENESIS 32, 23-33.	217
Ancient Versions and Targums	221
1. Dinah	223
2. Jacob the Ferryman.	223
3. Jacob Alone	223
4. The Encounter	226
5. Jacob is Wounded.	229
6. The Opponent Asks for His Release	231
7. The New Name and Its Meaning.	232
8. The Opponent Leaves	234
9. The Sunrise	235
10. The Sciatic Nerve Law	237
Later Traditions	246
Conclusions.	252
IV. EARLY CHRISTIAN AND ALEXANDRIAN JEWISH HERMENEUTIC OF GENESIS 32, 23-33	259
A. Early Greek and Latin Apologists	260
B. Alexandrian Hermeneutics	265
C. Later Eastern Writers.	271
D. Antiochean Hermeneutics.	274
E. Western Writers through Augustine.	277
F. Western Writers after Augustine.	289
Excursus: Related Art Works.	296
Conclusions.	299
CONCLUSIONS.	302
APPENDIX I. JEWISH TRANSLATIONS AND TARGUMS OF GENESIS 18, 1-16.	312
APPENDIX II. JEWISH TRANSLATIONS AND TARGUMS OF GENESIS 32, 23-33.	326
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY.	332

INTRODUCTION

Present day students pursuing graduate studies in the Old Testament work in a very rich and complex field. Advances in many related subjects, such as ancient Near Eastern languages, archaeology, and history, contribute to the vast amount of information to be acquired. The exegesis of biblical texts, that is the explication of their original content, form, and Sitz im Leben, is the primary purpose of such scholarship.

The exegetical skills and interests gained in graduate study will be passed on to others, usually through publishing and teaching. However, a certain percentage of these graduate students become involved in ministry, and find themselves confronted in varying degrees with the task of hermeneutics, the task of drawing authentic relationships between the content and contexts of biblical passages and the life situations and systems of thought of present day congregations or groups of believers.

Training in hermeneutics varies considerably from one denomination to another, from one faith to another. An individual may find a congregation or group to minister to without himself having had any such training at all.

One obvious method of training people in the art of

hermeneutics is to present them with some of the history of the art as it has been practiced over the centuries. Yet this is rarely done. The reasons are not hard to discover. Much of modern scholarly understanding of the Bible is so unlike the literal, fundamentalist understanding of previous generations that their writings are usually taught in other disciplines such as doctrinal or spiritual theology, Rabbinics, or Patristics. Further, the press of related subjects limits experimentation in this regard in Old Testament graduate course requirements.¹

In an effort to learn some lessons from the history of hermeneutics I chose to examine ancient writings on specific biblical passages. By looking at both Jewish and Christian commentary on two different passages, and by extending the study over as long a period of time as was practical (to Yalkut

¹In recent years scholars have begun to stress the study of early biblical commentary. Perhaps the most obvious foci for scholars have been the areas of Intertestamental literature and Comparative Midrash. These disciplines seek greater understanding of extrabiblical thought which may have affected the New Testament milieu or which may advance our knowledge of early Judaism and Christianity.

I would like to mention two writers in particular who have called for a greater appreciation of the history of biblical study and hermeneutics. Brevard Childs, in his recent commentary, The Book of Exodus (Westminster, 1974), included historical outlines of Jewish and Christian understandings of each section of the book. These form an admirable example of the way to heal the "sharp break" with the church's traditions which he speaks of in Ch. 8 of his earlier Biblical Theology in Crisis (Westminster, 1970). James Smart spoke convincingly of the need for the history of hermeneutics to be taught as a discipline of theology in The Strange Silence of the Bible in the Church (Westminster, 1970).

Shimoni and the writings of Bede respectively), I hope to discover as many lessons as possible.¹

The two passages used in this dissertation, Genesis 18, 1-16, and 32, 23-33, were not initially selected with reference to modern critical bases. They are, however, very similar narratives. Both are from the Jahwist and both obviously developed in complex ways before he used them. Both must be taken within the contexts of their respective patriarchal narrative cycles in order to appreciate the many subtle notes being raised within them about the relationships between God and man. These two mysterious encounters, special moments in the lives of Abraham, Sarah, and Jacob, are provocative texts for anyone of any time who is called to the task of hermeneutics.

Before going on to examine the two Genesis texts and the writings about them, I want to mention the reflections of one Old Testament scholar on the subject of hermeneutics.

¹The reference systems available for biblical citations of early Christian writers at the start of my research for this dissertation were the Genesis volume of the Bueron Abbey's Vetus Latina series (Herder, 1954), B. Fischer ed., microfiche lists from the Centre d'Analyse et de Documentation Patristiques at the University of Strasbourg, and the hit and miss method of searching in editions of Patristic works. The Bueron Genesis apparatus does not include LXX or Vulgate citations, and the more complete Strasbourg citations only went up to a little after the time of Origen. It is possible, therefore, that I have fewer LXX citations by Greek Fathers than are extant. The Strasbourg citations are now available in book form under the title Biblia Patristica: Index des Citations et Allusions Bibliques dans la Littérature Patristique (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris), and two volumes have been issued so far.

James A. Sanders¹ observes that older biblical traditions were often used by the prophets and other biblical authors and editors in one of two ways. They either invoked old traditions to bring support and comfort to their audiences or, alternatively, to challenge them in some way.²

Starting with these two ways as fundamental hermeneutical modes, which he calls "constitutive" and "prophetic" respectively, Sanders goes on to list several rules and principles which can be useful for current hermeneutics. Most of these rules are essentially aspects of the challenging or prophetic hermeneutic and need not be reviewed here. The last one, however,³ is germane to both the constitutive and prophetic mode.

¹"Hermeneutics" in Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement (Abingdon, 1976), pp. 402-407.

²Sanders offers some examples from Genesis traditions as used by Ezekiel and Second Isaia. Several examples of biblical adaptations of earlier traditions can be found in Renée Bloch, "Midrash" Dictionnaire de la Bible, Supplement, v. 5, Paris, 1957, columns 1263-1281; Brevard Childs, Biblical Theology in Crisis, pp. 151-200; James Sanders, "From Isaia 61 to Luke 4," Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults. Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty, ed. Jacob Neusner, Brill, 1975, part 1, pp. 75-106; Sanders, "Hermeneutics in True and False Prophecy," Beiträge zur Alttestamentlichen Theologie: Festschrift für Walter Zimmerli zum 70. Geburtstag. H. Donner, R. Hanhart, and R. Smend, eds. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1977); also his article on "Hermeneutics" mentioned above, pp. 404, 405, and 407; Geza Vermes, Scripture and Tradition in Judaism, 2nd ed., Brill, 1973, pp. 178-227; and M. Gertner, "Midrashim in the New Testament," Journal of Semitic Studies 7 (1962): 267-292.

³Rule 8g, pp. 406-407.

The rule is that we must be willing to admit that many Old Testament characters are actually portrayed as sinful, weak human beings. We cannot minimize or deny the weaknesses portrayed in our efforts to draw morals from the story for our own time. The two processes, admitting imperfections in the Old Testament figures and drawing morals while denying the existence of such imperfections, are respectively called "theologizing" and "moralizing" by Sanders.

As the comments of the Jewish and Christian writers on the Mamre and Jabbok stories are examined in the next four chapters, I would like to see how much of their hermeneutics can be placed into the constitutive and prophetic categories mentioned above. It should also be possible to discern whether these ancient writers admit to human weaknesses on the part of Abraham, Sarah, or Jacob. These hermeneutical modes and rules are not meant to be criteria by which to judge the men of former centuries. Rather, we should look on them simply as aids in our own comprehension of a large number of citations.

Further, it is obvious that these modes and rules are very general in nature. In order to examine specific Jewish or Christian materials for definite spans of time we will need many additional tools. However, the claim made in this study is that there is a strong biblical foundation for this system of modes and rules, and that they should be helpful for anyone doing hermeneutics now. In applying some elements of Sanders' system to the hermeneutical work of former generations I am

simply trying to see how those generations were affected by the same biblical foundation.

One might object that I am trying to do two different things at once--a historical study and an assessment of the results in light of one article by a modern scholar. The objection is valid, but there are two additional points to be considered. First, the time spent in application of these general modes and rules to the ancient material will be clearly defined. Second, there is always the possibility that the hermeneutical efforts of the early Jews and Christians will compel us to reevaluate Sanders' system, which we shall do in the final conclusions section.

CHAPTER I

EARLY JEWISH HERMENEUTIC OF GENESIS 18, 1-16

In addition to keeping in mind Sanders' general hermeneutical modes and rules, we shall consider the recent work of Daniel Patte, who has examined ancient Jewish hermeneutic in particular.¹

He begins by reviewing current scholarship on different aspects of the use of Scripture in the Synagogue.² As is the case with other scholars³ who have worked in this area, Patte considers the study of the Targums to be very important in

¹In his book, Early Jewish Hermeneutic in Palestine (SBL Dissertation Series 22, 1975), Patte searched for hermeneutic patterns in the New Testament era (the period 100 B.C. to 100 A.D.). His study included an analysis of Apocalyptic and Qumranian materials as well as the works of early Pharisees and Rabbis. Since there seems to be no Apocalyptic or Qumranian commentary on our two texts, we shall not refer to his conclusions regarding these materials.

Since Patte had to make extensive use of writings from times well after the New Testament era, his findings may well be helpful to anyone using the same Jewish sources.

²These aspects include the choice of readings (i.e., Seder and Haftarah, as reconstructed by Jacob Mann in The Bible as Read and Preached in the Old Synagogue (Cincinnati, 1940), homily structures (discerned in Midrashim), the role of Targums, and prayers.

³Bloch, "Midrash," cols. 1278-1279. Also Martin McNamara, The New Testament and The Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch (Rome: P.I.B., 1966), and Targum and Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972).

helping us to see how biblical passages were commonly understood early on.

He discerns two general norms, two underlying attitudes toward Scripture as a result of his own analysis of several Targum passages.¹ The first is that since everything is meaningful in the Bible, any detail can be interpreted by referring to other Scriptural passages. The second is that Scripture is meant to be actualized. Let us look at each of these norms more closely.

A) A Biblical Verse Can Be Interpreted
By Other Passages

While some Targumic citations of parallel passages are evident enough, we must realize that, by the very liturgical roles of the Targums in explaining difficult phrases and in transmitting well known traditions, they usually present only the results of the use of other biblical passages.² Often it is difficult to perceive the specific text which the Targumist had in mind; but even if we cannot discover a linking passage, by considering the other readings for the day, other traditions, or the like, we should assume that in most instances the Targum interpretation was Scripturally based.

Such constant comparison of biblical passages can lead to a "synthetic" view of the relationship between Scripture and

¹Chapter 4, esp. pp. 55-76.

²Patte, pp. 66-67.

sacred history (i.e., a view that the two are basically identical; that Scripture contains all sacred history).¹

Such a conception of the unity of the Scriptures lies behind Targumic statements which we can only regard as fanciful. The Targumists often ignored spans of centuries or great distances in their fusion of biblical identities, e.g., in their saying that Melchizedek was Noah's son Shem, or that the refugee mentioned in Genesis 14,13 was the king Og of Deuteronomy 3. Locations were also fused, such as in the tradition that the Temple was built on the exact site where Jacob had had his dream of the ladder and the angels. The times and dates of certain biblical events were often said to coincide with feast days or other significant anniversaries.² Patte calls this process of fusing diverse identities, locations, or times a telescoping.

As Patte observes, ". . . the result of this synthetic view of history is to reduce the sacred history to a schematic

¹Patte, p. 67. The question of whether the synthetic view was the cause of the constant comparison or its effect is not resolved by Patte. See p. 72.

²We must also mention here the related custom of explaining discrepancies in the biblical texts by rearranging chronological sequences when necessary (cf. Patte, p. 69). Thus, in Genesis Rabbah*70,4 (on Gen. 28, 20), some Rabbis suggest that the vow should precede so that Jacob will not seem to have doubted God's assurance in that verse. We will use M. A. Mirkin, Midrash Rabbah 9 vols. (Tel Aviv: Yavneh, 1956-1964) for most Rabbah texts; Genesis Rabbah texts will be taken from J. Theodor and C. Albeck, Midrash Bereshit Rabbah 3 vols. (Jerusalem: Wahrmann, 1965). English translations can be found in H. Freedman and M. Simon, Midrash Rabbah 10 vols. (London: Soncino, 1951).

series of privileged events."¹ For the Targums this sacred history is, so to speak, "closed": everything in the Bible is interpreted as referring to this limited number of sacred events (acts or words of God).²

Major biblical figures also had other biblical passages telescoped to them or applied to them in more significant ways. Sometimes these figures were seen as part of a larger series of closed events (e.g., merit schemes, some of which we will examine in detail below). Frequently other passages were invoked to help show that these figures had certain ethical values, that they were moral examples whom the faithful should imitate. This interest in the moral example afforded by these major figures is the principal exception to the lack of reference to present events mentioned above. Here the circle of interpretation of Scripture by Scripture is broken; the biblical person is interpreted in terms of the believer's situation.³

¹p. 72.

²Only one element is sometimes added--the eschatological event. For the Targumist then, Scripture refers exclusively either to the sacred history contained therein or to the eschatological time, which is far in the future. Patte (p. 72) goes on to say that he cannot find reference in the Targums to present events (present to the Targumist) which could be considered as having this basic identity with the events of the sacred history.

³p. 74. Patte speaks of the figures being presented as moral types. They are types of the faithful Jew, the ideal believer.

B) Scripture Is Meant To Be Actualized

It was certainly a belief of the Jewish people that the Scriptures had meaning for the Jewish community of any place or time. A few Targumic passages, in offering interpretations or explanations of a difficult text, clearly read current concepts back into the Scriptural account (in addition to reading in ethical and moral values, as discussed above). These deliberate adaptations often go beyond what we would expect to find in a semi-official form of liturgical literature such as the Targums.¹ Patte postulates that Targumic actualizations are few because Targums were used by the Jewish community as gathered in the Synagogue; there people ideally would have the same value systems which the Scripture readings and other worship forms were celebrating.² Hence, Targumic actualizations would have been redundant in such situations.

Patte next examines the halakic traditions, which were developed in the School rather than in the Synagogue.³ There were two sources for the halakoth: customs or traditions having no biblical connections, and Scriptural rules and regulations. Thus the "oral Torah" was not closed in the same sense that the written Torah was to a reading of current cultural influences and events.

¹For examples, see Patte, pp. 77-79.

²p. 80.

³Pp. 87-127.

A close reading of halakic materials does show, however, that here also the actualizations which we have were influenced by the notion that Scripture includes all sacred history. Contemporary history, contemporary salient events are rarely commented upon.¹ Instead the subject matter of the halakoth focused on cultural changes, changes in everyday life, laws, current ideas, ways of thinking, and folklore.²

I am convinced that Patte's analysis of ancient Jewish hermeneutical norms and methods can be of use to us as we examine the Mamre and Jabbok passages. It provides us with a way to comprehend and subdivide a large body of writings. We can test his findings as we assemble the many individual references in the ancient literature.³ We will look for the correlation of other biblical passages to the two stories we have chosen in order to see how they helped illuminate them. We will be alert to any telescoping, any schemata which fuse separate biblical places, times, or persons. We will note ascriptions of specific virtues to the leading characters in these two passages,

¹Patte speaks of the Rabbis' "utter inability to interpret the history of their own time," p. 119.

²Patte, p. 120.

³Most of our references will be in haggadic texts (we will take haggadah in its broadest sense--i.e., all ancient Jewish writings other than the halakah, which deals with religious law). It would extend the scope of this research too far were we to attempt to analyze how the various rules of evidence (e.g., the seven middoth of Hillel, the thirteen middoth of R. Ishmael, and the like) apply in each case.

and any other deliberate adaptations or actualizations made by the commentators.

Before examining the ancient translations, Targums, and Jewish commentaries on the Mamre passage, we should review briefly current analyses of the narrative.

The biblical account maintains an ambiguity as to the exact nature of the divine and angelic visitations by means of its identifications and enumeration of subjects and speakers. Thus Jahweh is clearly the subject in verses 1 and 13; it is also possible that He is the single addressee in verse 3 and the speaker in verses 10, 14, and 15b.¹ On the other hand, Abraham's term of address in verse 3, אֲדֹנָי, can also be understood as "my lord" or "sir," with just a slight change in pointing. So it is possible that, in pre-Massoretic traditions, the principal of the three visitors was being spoken to in this verse. Since the three visitors continue to occupy center stage thereafter, the principal visitor might also be the subject in verses 10, 14, and 15b.

An examination of the comments of a representative

¹We should also allow for the possibility that the three "men" were the instruments of a theophany. If such a triple mode of appearance were a metamorphosis of Jahweh, it would be unique in the Old Testament. See G. von Rad, Genesis, John Marks trans. (Westminster, 1961), p. 200, or Kenneth Kuntz, The Self-Revelation of God (Westminster, 1967), pp. 122-123.

sampling of twentieth century scholars¹ reveals several common areas of interest.

Almost all these commentators speculate to some extent on the possibility that earlier traditions have been worked into the present Jahwist account. Several assume that the mention of the gift of Isaac has been grafted onto an older legend which dealt primarily with hospitality. Parallels from pagan literature (some of them Canaanite) are often mentioned. Because of the existence of literary parallels most of these scholars conclude that the three visitors are meant to be angels rather than Jahweh Himself in metamorphosis.

Several incidents in the story, such as the sudden appearance of the visitors, the surprising question in verse 9, and Abraham's silence in contrast to Sarah's reactions to

¹The following works are listed in chronological order, beginning with H. Gunkel's 1910 research, except for Vawter's second book which is listed with his earlier Path through Genesis since their contents are very similar. Hermann Gunkel, Genesis, 6th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1964), pp. 193-201; John Skinner, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis (Scribners, 1925), pp. 298-304; Julian Morgenstern, The Book of Genesis: A Jewish Interpretation (Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1919), 1965 reprint, pp. 115-121; Benno Jacob, Das Erste Buch der Tora: Genesis (Berlin: Schocken, 1934), pp. 435-446 and 979-980; the abbreviated English rendition of the same, The First Book of the Bible: Genesis, Ernest I. Jacob and Walter Jacob, trans. and eds. (Ktav, 1974), pp. 116-123; The Interpreter's Bible, vol. 1, "Genesis," by Cuthbert A. Simpson (Abingdon, 1952), pp. 616-621; Gerhard von Rad, Genesis, pp. 198-204; Bruce Vawter, A Path through Genesis (Sheed and Ward, 1956), pp. 146-150; also by Vawter, On Genesis: A New Reading (Doubleday, 1977), pp. 225-228; E. A. Speiser, Genesis, The Anchor Bible series (New York: Doubleday, 1964), pp. 128-135; and T. H. Gaster, Myth, Legend, and Custom in the Old Testament (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), pp. 156-158.

the message, are seen as contributing to a gradual awareness on the part of Abraham and Sarah that their visitors are more than human and that the message is from God. Most of these commentators propose that the Massoretic pointing of ^{אֱלֹהִים} in verse 3 is not in accordance with this motif of Abraham and Sarah's gradual awareness, and so should be set aside.

The stress on hospitality in the first half of the story is seen as a value in itself, a highly proclaimed virtue in the ancient Near East. The literary climax of the second half of the passage is generally taken to be the question in verse 14. Nothing is too hard for Jahweh, who will effect His promise to Abraham in full.

Modern commentators, then, exhibit two primary areas of interest in the Mamre story: many focus on possible antecedents to the final form as we have it, and several try to establish the main literary motifs and climaxes in the final form as such. One can reasonably speak of a consensus among them, perhaps citing von Rad's work or Speiser's as representative. None of these writers presents a systematic description of the history of ancient Jewish or Christian hermeneutic of the passage.

The most notable departure from the general run of modern commentary on our passage is made by Benno Jacob. In his view Abraham expects the messengers and is already in 18, 1 aware of God's plans for Sodom and Gomorrah (mentioned later in 18, 17-20). Abraham's hospitality and escorting of

his guests are means whereby he seeks and is encouraged to intercede for these cities. The whole passage is subordinated to the events concerning the destruction of the cities.¹

Ancient Versions and Targums
on Gen. 18, 1-16

Any study of ancient Jewish biblical commentary and hermeneutical patterns should begin with the principal versions and the Targums used in the Synagogues.² A synopsis and a chart of the variations and patterns found therein will be presented here. A more detailed description of the refinements of each version or Targum may be found in Appendix I.

The biblical "oaks of Mamre" is considered to be a specific location (or valley or crossroad), and not just an unknown stand of trees. While LXX and Peshitta have "oak" in the singular, no version or Targum firmly identifies any tree in verse 1 with the tree of verses 4 and 8.³ The visit is

¹A close reading of the original German edition shows that Jacob's formal arguments are usually based on biblical parallels rather than on extra-biblical Jewish traditions.

²For Gen. 18 we will examine the Septuagint, Peshitta, and Samaritan Pentateuch, as well as Targums Neofiti, Fragmentary, Onkelos, Ps.-Jonathan, and Samaritan.

³The "oaks of Mamre" are also mentioned in Gen. 13, 18 and 14, 13. The latter verse indicates that Mamre was an Amorite ally of Abraham. Text critical procedures (primarily LXX and Peshitta, also the oak of Moreh, Gen. 12, 6 and 35, 4,

assumed to follow upon Abraham's circumcision (Gen. 17) by only a few days. In some of the Targums phrases such as "the word of Jahweh" or "the glory of Jahweh" are used in order to modify the impression, which could be had from the MT, that Abraham had a direct vision of God. Further, the three visitors are identified as angels in human form by some of the Targums. In some cases Abraham's bow to them is further explained so that it may not be interpreted as being a form of divine worship. In several instances the duties of each angel are also mentioned.

All the Jewish versions and Targums except the Samaritan branch agree with the MT pointing of אֲדָמִי in verse 3. The Samaritan Pentateuch and Targum read the plural "lords"

becoming oaks of Moreh in Deut. 11, 30) could lead one to prefer the singular oak in Gen. 13, 18; 14, 13; 18, 1; and Deut. 11, 30. In that case it would be possible to see the oak of Gen. 18, 1 as being identical with the tree of Gen. 18, 4 and 8. The United Bible Society's Preliminary and Interim Report on the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project, vol. 1 Pentateuch (London, 1974), retains the plural form as a *lectio difficilior* against assimilation. In my research, the only ancient Jewish commentator to identify the oak with the tree of vv. 4 and 8 was Rashi. Simons points out that Gen. 13, 18; 23, 19; and 35, 27 seem to suggest that Mamre is an equivalent name for Hebron, while Gen. 23, 17; 25, 9; 49, 30; and 50, 13 imply that the field and cave of Machpelah in Hebron were opposite Mamre. Therefore Machpelah and Mamre were distinct locations, although they could have been near each other. (J. Simons, The Geographical and Topological Texts of the Old Testament, Brill, 1959, pp. 212-213.)

throughout the entire verse. Some Targums refer here to the Shekinah of Jahweh.¹

In verse 4 some traditions assume that Abraham personally fetched the water and washed the feet of his guests, while others portray him as a host whose servants performed these tasks. Targum Ps.-Jonathan makes it quite clear that Abraham had turned his attention from Jahweh to the three travellers.

In some instances it is noted that the travellers came exactly in time for the noon meal. In Ps.-Jonathan Abraham enjoins them to pray a grace before the meal.

Different terms are used to explain the עֲנַח of verse 6. They generally indicate kinds of bread which can be made with little or no leaven but which need more heat (i.e., scones, flatbreads, or the like). Neofiti's פִּטְרִין most specifically indicates the absence of leaven. Most of the traditions retain the large amount of flour found in the MT.

Neofiti and Ps.-Jonathan deny the plain meaning of the MT in verse 8 by stating that the angel travellers only seemed to eat and drink.

The LXX and some copies of Ps.-Jonathan have a single speaker in verse 9. In verse 10 only Ps.-Jonathan clearly

¹The Shekinah concept, often found in Targums and haggadic sources, refers to the cloud of bright light of God's glory. It is used to express the immanence of God, His special abiding among righteous men or among His chosen people. See The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, 4 vols. (Abingdon, 1962), vol. 4, 317-319.

identifies the speaker as one of the travellers, although Neofiti and Fragmentary can be understood to do the same. Some of the paraphrases of כעת חיה refer to a time one year from the present while others indicate that both Abraham and Sarah will become more robust in the meanwhile. Many efforts are made to clarify MT וְהָיָה אַחֲרָיו. One tradition was that the הָיָה referred to Ishmael.

We find many paraphrases of Sarah's reactions in verse 12. Some of these use the verbs קטרג or חוץ, which may intensify the sense of צחק. Others simply use חמה. Several Targums have Sarah reflect on the days of her youth. The LXX is the most unlike the MT here.

All the versions and Targums record that Jahweh is the speaker of verse 13, regardless of any prior modifications made in verses 1 or 3.

The speaker of verse 14 is not identified in the Targums, although Neofiti and Ps.-Jonathan can be understood to refer to one of the angels. Several traditions ask if anything is or can be hidden from Jahweh. The reference could be to Sarah's laughter or doubt, which is supposedly hidden from the speaker. Ps.-Jonathan explains למדע as the time of "the feast." Presumably those congregations knew which feast was being recalled. Most of the other Targums do not dwell upon the term at all.

Only Ps.-Jonathan clearly identifies the respondent of verse 15 as an angel; Neofiti can lend itself to such a reading.

In this chart X indicates the presence of the topic in question; x indicates that the source can be taken as a partial witness, or that inferences can reasonably be drawn from its context. Numbers in parentheses refer to other verses in the same source which apply to the topic.

LXX Neo. Frg. Onk. Ps.J. Psh. Sm.P. Sm.T.

Location is further specified.	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Abraham's recent circumcision is mentioned.		X	X		X		
God's mode of appearance is specified.		X	X		X		
The three visitors are angels.		X	X		X		
The angels' duties are mentioned.		X	X		X(16)		
Abraham's bow is explained.		X	x				
יְהוָה in v. 3 does not refer to Jahweh.					X	X	X
The Shekinah concept is used.		X			X		
Abraham personally fetched the water.		X			X		
It was time for the noon meal.	(1)	X			X		
The angels only seemed to eat.		X			X		
The speaker in v. 10 is an angel.		x		x	X		
The return will be in a year.	x				X		
The couple will be vigorous.				X	X		
Ishmael is spoken of in v. 10.		X		X	X		
The speaker in v. 14 is an angel.		x			x		
Can anything be hidden from God?		X		X	X		
The return will be at a feast day.					X		
The speaker in v. 15 is an angel.		x			X		

Other Rabbinic Traditions on Gen. 18, 1-16

In the following pages I will attempt to give an overview of all the significant references to the Mamre story to be found in Rabbinic sources of the first millenium A.D.¹ The reason for extending the search up to the 11th century Yalkut Shimoni, and to a few excerpts from early medieval sources such as Rashi, Maimonides, and Zohar is simple. The state of Rabbinic studies is such at the present time that we are not able closely to correlate the dates of written manuscripts with the dates of the traditions which they contain. Thus a 7th century commentary might well have preserved statements of a 3rd or 4th century origin. Only by getting an overall picture of all the citations of a particular passage can one hope to discern the important trends in the Rabbinic hermeneutical traditions.

I have compiled the comments on these verses into sixteen groupings, but that number is an arbitrary one. I have made no effort to eliminate all overlapping between groupings since the logical end point would be a return to a reference list such as Hyman's. Rather I have tried to be sensitive to the contexts within which these verses are cited and to pre-

¹The principal source of information as to where such references occur is Aaron Hyman, Sefer Torah Haketuvah Wehamesurah al Torah, Neviim, uKhetuvim, 3 vols. (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1964-1965. This is a reprint of the original 1936-1939 edition). More recently published texts and translations frequently have helpful indices, but Hyman's work has not yet been improved upon in any systematic way.

sent the different Rabbinic written sources in an elementary chronological order only within these context groupings. I have, therefore, not seen it necessary to mention the names of the Rabbis and teachers with whom certain traditions are usually associated, nor to fix a misleadingly precise series of dates to the various manuscripts.

I have made every effort to use the Massoretic Hebrew chapter and verse numbers throughout, although there are surely points where I might have confused them with the English enumeration, which is usually off by one verse when it does differ. If the English enumeration is quite different, I do mention that fact.

As for the Hebrew sources, they are generally well known.¹ I provide slightly fuller information than is usual when citing the Palestinian Talmud, and the Yalkut references. The Yalkut is usually printed in two volumes--comments on the Pentateuch comprising volume 1. Rather than simply indicating the volume number, I indicate which book of the Bible is under consideration. Tanhuma B² is a variant text of the Tanhuma. I have not eliminated reduplications between the two texts. I

¹An excellent guide to ancient Rabbinic materials and publications is to be had in John Townsend's "Rabbinic Sources" in The Study of Judaism: Bibliographical Essays (A.D.L., 1972), pp. 37-80.

²Tanhuma B is my designation for the text found in S. Buber, Midrash Tanchuma (Rome: Vilna, 1913). All other Tanhuma references are from E. Schrentzel, Midrash Tanhuma (Stettin, 1863).

am reasonably sure that, in so using the two texts, I have included some real repetitions.

The references marked with an asterisk have been studied only in translation. Usually these are repetitive of themes already well developed. Likewise, the Zohar references were studied only in translation, unless otherwise indicated.

1. Traditions About the Location

We find some traditions about Mamre in Genesis Rabbah.¹ R. Judah calls it a plain (מישרי) and a place (אחרא). R. Nehemiah calls it a palace (פלטיין),² a palace of a man named Mamre. Why was his name Mamre? R. Azariah, in the name of R. Judah, says that it was because he argued (הימרה) against Abraham. As the story goes, Abraham took counsel after God had told him that He wished circumcision to be the sign of the covenant between them. Two friends advised Abraham against it, but Mamre reminded him about all that God had done for him and that he should undergo this suffering in return. Then God said to Mamre, "You gave him good advice. By your life, I will reveal Myself to him only in your palace."³

¹Ch. 42, sect. 8. The text in question is Gen. 14, 13.

²The connection between oaks and palace might be the synonym for oaks (בלוטין). Word plays of this sort were very common.

³The same sort of tradition is recounted in Tanhuma par. 3, where it is mentioned that Mamre exhorted Abraham to accept circumcision, and in Yalkut, Gen. 73. In this last

The explanation of Mamre's name as being related to Abraham's decision to accept circumcision reminds us once again of the serious obligation of circumcision on all Jewish men. Thus even a place name can be "telescoped" to an important custom.

2. Abraham's Situation

A) His desire for visitors

Rabbinic traditions about the hospitality which was shown by Abraham are very strong and will be taken up in detail later in this chapter. Here we will simply mention a few of the general remarks found at the outset of comments on the entire passage.

In Genesis Rabbah¹ we read that Abraham was worried that, now that he was circumcised, no travellers would come to visit him. God replies that whereas uncircumcised visitors had come in the past, now "I in my glory will come to you." We also read² that when Sodom was destroyed, wayfarers ceased to come by and Abraham said, "Why should I permit hospitality

citation we are again dealing with Gen. 14, 13; Mamre was the man who rebuked (מר) Abraham on the question of delaying to circumcise. Much later, Rashi mentions the same tradition, calling the place Mamre's region.

Our Yalkut references will be from Yalkut Shimoni, 2 vols. (New York: Horeb, 1925). This was reprinted in Jerusalem (Lewin-Epstein, 1951).

¹Ch. 47, par. 10.

²Genesis Rabbah, Ch. 52, par. 1.

to cease from my house?" He therefore moved to the region of Gerar (Gen. 20, 1). R. Abin cites here Job 14, 18, "The rock is removed from its place."¹

Another reference is made in Pesikta Rabbati 42:3.² Here, during a rather compassionate discussion about the sins of Lot's daughters, we find a consideration about Abraham and how he extended hospitality to visitors and inhabitants in the regions about Sodom before that city was destroyed. Yalkut, Gen. 82 and Rashi also mention that Abraham was sitting by the door of the tent looking for travellers to invite in.

In these references we see Abraham being presented as a "moral type" of the virtue of hospitality. The matter of Abraham's circumcision is again mentioned, but here we have a hint that God's appearance is to be considered as a reward for accepting the covenantal sign of circumcision.

B) His recuperation from circumcision

The interest in Abraham's circumcision continues to

¹In another section of the same source (Ch. 56, par. 5), in a passage dealing with Abraham's near slaying of Isaac, we find a chain of verses from Isaia 33 applied to Abraham. For verse 8a, "the highways are laid waste," the question is asked, "does not Abraham receive travellers and dwellers?", thus reminding us that Abraham had invited travellers from the highways. Similarly, verse 8b of Isaia 33 "the wayfarer ceases" calls to mind that Sarah no longer had the way of women. Also Isaia 33, 8c "cities are despised" is interpreted to mean that Abraham sought to practice hospitality in the countryside.

²We will use M. Friedmann, Pesikta Rabbati (Vienna, 1880). English references are from W. G. Braude, Pesikta Rabbati, 2 vols. (Yale Judaica series, 1968).

manifest itself in our sources. In Numbers Rabbah¹ Leviticus 9, 6, "And Moses said, 'This is the thing which the Lord commanded you to do; and the glory of the Lord will appear to you'" is applied to Abraham. As soon as Abraham had circumcised himself (Gen. 17, 26), then God revealed Himself to him (Gen. 18, 1). Likewise, the commentator has Moses demand that any uncircumcised men undergo the ritual right away.²

In Genesis Rabbah³ we have another reference to Abraham's circumcision, based on Job 19, 26, "and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then from my flesh I shall see God." Abraham said, "After I removed my foreskin many proselytes came to practice this sign . . . If I had not done so, why should the Holy One have appeared to me?"⁴

There is one more relationship between Abraham and the ritual of circumcision.⁵ Since Abraham is the founder of the

¹Ch. 12, par. 8.

²Abraham is praised for undergoing the ritual in Tanhuma B ויקרא par. 4.

³Ch. 48, pars. 2 ff.

⁴In par. 3 a further quotation of Job 31, 13-14 is mentioned to point out that Abraham felt obliged to circumcise all his male kin. In pars. 4 and 5 there is further praise of circumcision as better than altars and sacrifices. The essentials are repeated in Yalkut, Job 907.

The theme that the Lord appeared to Abraham as a result of or as a reward for his circumcision is found in Zohar, 97b; part 2, 36a; part 3, 13b and 187ab. We will normally use the English translation by H. Sperling and M. Simon, The Zohar, 5 vols. (London: Soncino, 1933-1934). It is also in Pirke Eliezer, Ch. 29. We will use Abraham Broda, Sefer Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer (Antwerp, 1950).

⁵Genesis Rabbah, Ch. 48, par. 8.

faith, in the world to come he will sit at the door of Gehenna and render any unworthy Israelite indistinguishable from his non-Jewish fellow damned. Abraham will do this by grafting on them foreskins taken from worthy Jewish male infants who die before they are eligible for the ceremony.¹

Besides these more general "telescoping" remarks about circumcision, we also find comments, similar to the Targum observations, on Abraham's recuperation from the rite.

In Baba Mezia 86b R. Hama says that the appearance took place on the third day after Abraham's circumcision (the most painful period) and that God came to inquire after him.² More specifically, Abraham had sent his servant out to look for travellers but he had found none. Abraham then went out to see for himself and he found God, standing at the door. However, God realized at this point that Abraham was indisposed (loosening and binding the bandages), and so He went some distance away. The same is true of the three angelic visitors. At first they were near him but they saw that he was in pain; so they also said, "It is not proper to stand here" and moved away.³

¹This same tradition is recounted in Yalkut, Gen. 82.

²All modern editions of the Babylonian Talmud follow the exact form of Talmud Bavli (Rome: Vilna, 1886). English translations may be found in The Babylonian Talmud, Isadore Epstein, ed. (London: Soncino, 1935-1952). There are now available some volumes of a Hebrew-English set (Soncino, 1960-19).

³This movement makes sense of the mutually exclusive phrases נצבים עליך and ויריץ לקראתם in verse 2. So in Yalkut, Gen. 82 we read of the traditions that Abraham had to

Another way to describe Abraham's condition is simply to see him as a sick person, in that the operation requires a period of convalescence. So in Sotah 14a, in a discussion of some of the virtues of Moses, mention is made of works of mercy. God clothed the naked (Adam and Eve), and so should we. God visited the sick (Gen. 18, 1) and so should we.¹

Thus we see Abraham's continuing interest in hospitality, despite his pain from the circumcision. God and the angels are modest during the visit and solicitous for the sick in coming to visit him in the first place. These two virtues are obviously examples for our imitation as much as are the actions and attitudes of Abraham.

adjust the bandages, that he was still weak on the third day, that the angels moved back from near him. Rashi mentions that the Lord asked after his health on the third day. Zohar 101a mentions the angels asking after his health and about his resting from the circumcision. Rashi also mentions the bandages and the angels moving.

¹The same idea is repeated in Tanhuma ויטלח par. 10; Tanhuma ויטלח par. 2; Tanhuma B ויטלח par. 1; Genesis Rabbah* Ch. 8, par. 13; Qohelet Rabbah* Ch. 7, par. 2, where God's visiting the sick is seen as one of a series of firsts, i.e., first wedding (Gen. 2, 22), first sick visit (Gen. 18, 1), first funeral (Deut. 34, 6). A very similar list of divine ceremonies prompted by Psalm 25, 10, "all the paths of the Lord are love and faithfulness" can be found in Psalms Rabbah Ch. 25, par. 11 and Yalkut, Psalms 702 on the same verse. For Psalms Rabbah sources see S. Buber, Midrash Tehillim (Rome: Vilna, 1891). The Jerusalem 1965 reprint of this also contains Midrash Mishle on Proverbs. Another Yalkut reference is Yalkut, Deut. 886, which discusses false signs and wonders (Deut. 13, 1-3). God performs true signs such as visiting Abraham, burying Moses, etc. Further Yalkut passages listing such works of mercy include Yalkut, Gen. 16 (on Gen. 1, 22) and Yalkut, Gen. 33 (on Gen. 3, 20). In Yalkut, Gen. 82, God and the angels come to visit the sick man.

C) His sitting down

The fact that Abraham was seated when God visited him lent itself to several Rabbinic interpretations. The first interpretation was simply that God respected Abraham's old age. So in Pal. Talm. Rosh Hashanna¹ God stands before Abraham out of respect.²

Another line of thought is that Abraham was taking the posture which is normal in Jewish services and in the Beth Hamidrash. Genesis Rabbah³ has a good example of this often made analogy. Here we are advised to read not יושב (the participle) but ישב (the simple action), implying a more deliberate action, i.e., Abraham wished to rise but God said to him, "Sit, and be a sign to your children that as you sit before the Shekinah, so will your children sit." In other citations of this tradition it is clearly mentioned that assemblies and houses of Midrash are meant.⁴

¹Ch. 1, hlch. 3. Palestinian Talmud references will be from Talmud Yerushalmi (New York, 1958).

²A similar instance is in Pal. Talm. Biccurim, Ch. 3, hlch. 3; also in Leviticus Rabbah* Ch. 35, par. 3. Here the specific regulation in Lev. 19, 32 is cited, "You shall rise up before the hoary head." God, unlike earthly kings, is the first to carry out any one of His laws, as He does in standing before Abraham.

³Ch. 48, par. 7.

⁴Thus Tanhuma וירא par. 2; Tanhuma B וירא par. 4; Tanhuma B וישלח par. 28; Song of Songs Rabbah* Ch. 2, v. 9--here the verse "My beloved is like a gazelle" is taken to refer to God, who skips from one Synagogue to another. When He comes into such a place He stands as He did before Abraham,

Genesis Rabbah¹ mentions a phrase from Psalm 18, 36, "your humility has made me great" and applies this to God's humility in standing before Abraham.²

We have seen here more examples of actions taken by God which are for our imitation. God honors Abraham's old age; He is humble before the patriarch. Also, justification for the approved posture when one is in Synagogue or School is based on God's wishes, and not merely on the posture which Abraham happened to be taking at the time of the visit.

3. The Day and the Hour

The various interpretations of the time of the theophany seem to be centered on God's involvement.

Some commentators saw significance in the fact that this theophany took place during the bright part of the day. In Genesis Rabbah³ the evoking text is Gen. 20, 3, "God came to Abimelech in a dream of the night." The Lord deals with

etc. This is also the theme of Pesikta Rabbati Ch. 15, par. 9; Pesikta Rab Kahana Ch. 5, par. 8; Numbers Rabbah Ch. 11, par. 2; and Psalms Rabbah Ch. 22, par. 19 (on Psalm 22, 4). Our Kahana references are from B. Mandelbaum, Pesikta de Rab Kahana, 2 vols. (New York: JTSA, 1962).

¹Ch. 48, par. 1.

²Similarly Tanhuma פירוש par. 2; Exodus Rabbah Ch. 41, par. 4, which also mentions that Gen. 18, 22 is a Tiqun Soferim related to our topic; Psalms Rabbah Ch. 18, par. 29; less closely related instances would include Yalkut, 2 Sam. 162 and Yalkut, Psalms 831. Yalkut, Gen. 82 and Rashi both mention the idea that Abraham wanted to stand but God told him to sit, as a sign.

³Ch. 52, par. 5.

pagans as if from afar (e.g., Proverbs 15, 29 and Isaia 39, 3); whereas when dealing with Israel, it is as if He comes from nearby (e.g., Gen. 18, 1 and Lev. 1, 1).¹

In Pirke Eliezer Ch. 28 we are told that God comes in night visions to all prophets but to Abraham He revealed Himself in a night vision (Gen. 15, 1) and in an actual visit (Mamre).²

Many commentators speculate on the exact time of the day or the amount of heat. In Berakoth 27a there is a discussion on times for prayer. The commentary assumes that כחם היום of Gen. 18, 1 means the sixth hour of the day.

In Pal. Talm. Berakoth³ Rab Tanhuma thinks that the time is when no creature has a shadow (i.e., high noon). Along the same lines, in Genesis Rabbah⁴ we find the description of no shade, and another motive: the Holy One poked a hole in Gehenna and heated up the whole world and

¹On Lev. 1, 1, Leviticus Rabbah* Ch. 1, par. 13 offers a little more information. God appears to heathens at night, as He did to Abimilech (Gen. 20, 3), Laban (Gen. 22, 24), and Balaam (Num. 22, 20). He appears to His chosen ones in full day, as to Abraham (Gen. 18, 1), and Moses (Ex. 6, 28 and Num. 3, 1).

²A similar comment on Gen. 20, 3 can be found in Yalkut, Gen. 88.

³Ch. 4, hlch. 1.

⁴Ch. 48, par. 8.

its inhabitants for a brief time, saying, "Shall righteous people be in pain and everyone else be at ease?"¹

Turning back to look at more instances of God's motives, another idea was that God had made it hot to discourage anyone from travelling at all, so as to spare Abraham any exertion in matters of hospitality. This theme is found in Baba Mezia 86b, where the sun is withdrawn from its sheath by God, so as not to disturb Abraham with travellers.²

In Pirke Eliezer³ there is another motive attributed

¹There follows the medical remark that "it follows that heat helps wounds." Similar notes are to be found in Tanhuma אר"א par. 3; Tanhuma B אר"א par. 4, which includes an excellent use of Malachi 3, 19-20 (English 4, 1-2). Mekilta Ishmael אר"א 5, on the subject of manna and its melting when the sun gets hot (Ex. 16, 16-27), guesses that, like Gen. 18, 1, this occurs by noon. A very similar case is in Mekilta Yohai אר"א 16, 21. Mekilta Ishmael references will be from J. Z. Lauterbach, Mekilta de Rabbi Ishmael, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1933-1935). Mekilta Yohai references will be from J. Epstein and E. Melamed, Mekilta d'Rabbi Simon b. Yochai (Jerusalem: Mekitze Nirdamim, 1955).

Other citations include Yalkut, Exod. 261, on the time for gathering quails; Yalkut, Jeremia 296, on the phrase in Jer. 17, 8, "the just man does not fear the heat"; Yalkut, Psalms 773, on Psalm 55, 21, "my companion stretched out his hand" in which we again have the depiction of Abraham guarding the entrance to Gehenna from entry by unworthy circumcised Israelites; and Yalkut, Song of Songs 986, on Ch. 2, v. 7 of that book, "until the day breathes." Yalkut, Gen. 82 describes the poking of the hole in Gehenna and the matter of the sixth hour and the healing of Abraham's wounds. In Zohar there are new developments. This type of light or heat is of the kind that can be withdrawn (temporary?). Another kind of light is used for healing, as in Gen. 32, 30. So Zohar 21a.

²So also in Yalkut, Gen. 82 and Rashi. Rashi sees God as repenting of this action due to Abraham's intense desire to be hospitable.

³Ch. 29.

to God for making the day very hot--He wanted to try Abraham. Abraham sought the breeze of the day by going to the tent doorway.

4. The Participants

It is understandable, given the tensions of the MT and the variety within the Targum traditions, that there continues to be considerable question in the Rabbinic commentaries as to the precise mode of appearance by God and the angels.

A) Divine and angelic presences

I think it would be fair to say that the majority of Rabbinic traditions hold for the appearance to Abraham of both the Divine Presence (usually under the Shekinah concept¹) and three angels. In Genesis Rabbah² Abraham complains of having no visitors since his circumcision. God replies that "I and my retainers (שלידי) will appear to you." The text then continues, "and he saw the Shekinah and he saw the angels."³

¹The Shekinah concept was already used in verse 3 of Targums Neofiti and Ps.-Jonathan. Maimonides in his Guide to the Perplexed* Part 1, sect. 4, says that every use of שכינה when referring to seeing God indicated an intellectual apprehension rather than a physical one. For the English of Maimonides, see The Guide to the Perplexed, Shlomo Pines trans. (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1963). The Hebrew may be found in Doctor Perplexorum, Samuel Tibbon ed., Yehuda Shmuel rev. (Jerusalem, 1946).

²Ch. 48, par. 9.

³The same is retold in Tanhuma ויראה par. 2; in Tanhuma שמואל par. 15, during a discussion about theophanies in general (such as Sinai), it is said of the appearance at Mamre that God appeared to him and afterward so did the three men. So also in Tanhuma ב ויראה par. 4.

In Tanhuma B בראשית par. 4, the proof is a bit more detailed. We know of the divine visit from verse 1, and we know that the angels came afterwards from verse 2. This citation also mentions that the Shekinah had not been at a distance, as Gen. 18, 22 might lead us to believe. We are told that Gen. 18, 22 is a Tiqqun Soferim.

Lastly, in Song of Songs Rabbah*¹ we are told that Abraham was clasped between the Shekinah and an angel. This is supported on verse 2, wherein Abraham saw the Shekinah and ran to the angels.

The specific problem of how to understand אדני in verse 3 (Lord or lord) is not resolved by what we have mentioned so far in this section. In Shebuoth 35b we find the following discussion. There is an opinion that every term of address used by Abraham in Scripture is sacred (i.e., refers to God) except the אדני in Gen. 18, 3. This term is secular (חול) (i.e., it means "my lord," referring to one of the angels). Two Rabbis think that the אדני of Gen. 18, is also sacred. R. Judah, in the name of Rab, said that hospitality to wayfarers is more important than receiving the Shekinah. Thus in verse 3, Abraham is asking the Lord to wait until he had entertained the three men. The same is implied in Ps.-Jonathan. This is a very strong endorsement of the virtue of hospitality.

¹Ch. 1, par. 13 on S.S. 1, 13, "my beloved lies between my breasts."

On the other hand, in Genesis Rabbah¹ we read that R. Hiyya taught that Abraham called "lord" the greatest of the angels, Michael. Several later works mention both sides of this dispute.²

B) Angelic duties

The Rabbinic traditions about angels in general and about their roles in this passage from Genesis in particular

¹Ch. 48, par. 10.

²Thus Masseketh Soferim* Ch. 4, rule 6; Sefer Torah* Ch. 4, rule 6; Yalkut, Deut. 856; and Yalkut, Gen. 82. The first two references may be found in The Minor Tractates of the Talmud, A. Cohen, ed., 2 vols. (London: Soncino, 1965). For the first we use M. Higger, Masseketh Soferim (New York: Debe Rabanan, 1937). Rashi says clearly that he thinks Abraham spoke only to the chief of the three angels. If he had wished to speak to all three he would have said lords. Besides, whatever the chief agreed to, the others would also do. Rashi also admits that there is a second opinion. In his commentary on Yoma 37a, Rashi seems to depict the precise arrangement of the three angels, i.e., next to each other but with the leader just a bit forward. The gemara at this point in the Talmud is talking about three men who are walking. Proper manners would have the teacher in the middle of the trio, with the senior student on his right. They should not be one behind the other but in one row, i.e., side by side. Rashi recalls that the three angels who came to Abraham

by implication, they were standing in one row, side by side; they were a bit behind the one--not the only one who came to Abraham--but the one who was their leader.

Zohar 101a (and 106b) says that Abraham had a separate vision of the Shekinah. Maimonides, Guide* Part 1, sect. 61, and Part 2, sect. 42, holds for the side that Abraham was speaking only to the chief angel. In Guide* Part 2, sect. 45, the Mamre visit is listed as the tenth highest of eleven grades of prophecy (I would use the word revelation to express what Maimonides seems to mean by prophecy). However, in Mishne Torah הלכות יסודי התורה Perek 6, par. 9, Maimonides says that all the names used by Abraham are holy, even the one in Gen. 18, 3. He even repeats, "Behold, this is holy." For text, see Mishne Torah, David Arama, ed. (Jerusalem, 1965).

are very rich. Let us first consider God's dominion over the angels.

In Exodus Rabbah*¹ we come to consider God's power and how He delegates some of this to angels. Sometimes God has His angels sit (Judg. 6, 11), stand (Isaia 6, 2), appear to be men, and so on.² In a similar listing occasioned by Exodus 3, 14,³ God mentions that He can make angels sit down (Gen. 18, 4), and the like.

Some of our sources explain the missions of the angels in great detail; they had much more important mandates than the preceding lists from Exodus Rabbah would indicate. As was mentioned earlier, Targums Neofiti, Fragmentary, and Ps.-Jonathan listed the duties of each angel: one announced the news that Isaac would be born (presumably based on Gen. 18, 10); another came to rescue Lot (cf. Gen. 19, 17 and 21); and the third came to destroy Sodom and environs. In the mention of these duties, we are reminded of some of the context of our story--the rest of Genesis chapters 18 and 19.

In Baba Mezia 86b the three angels are named: Michael, who brings the news to Sarah and then rescues Lot; Gabriel,

¹Ch. 25, par. 2.

²Yalkut, Judges 69 mentions that the angels who came to Abraham were "as men." So also in Yalkut, Daniel 1063, and in Maimonides, Guide* Part 2, sect. 6.

³As found in Exodus Rabbah* Ch. 3, par. 6.

who destroys Sodom; and Raphael, who is to heal Abraham.¹

In Pirke Eliezer² we learn a bit more about the sequence of events. One angel began to tell Abraham about the conception in Sarah's womb. Another told him about the coming destruction of Sodom (Gen. 18, 20). From this we learn that anyone who wishes to tell his neighbor something which might be repulsive to him should start off by saying some good words. Here we have a small example of the actualization of Scripture, or perhaps it is simply a matter of the angels being "moral types" here.

Some traditions concern themselves with the apparent identities of the visitors. In Genesis Rabbah³ we are told that Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael, who appeared to Abraham, seemed to be of different non-Jewish backgrounds. One seemed to be a Saracen, and another a Nabatean, and the third an

¹Note the new duty of healing Abraham. Michael and Gabriel, at least, are heavenly princes, according to Genesis Rabbah, Ch. 78, par. 1. In Josephus' Antiquities 1, 11, 12, when Sarah objected that she and Abraham were elderly and so could not have a son, the visitors could no longer refrain from revealing their identities. They admitted that they were angels of God, one of whom had been sent to deliver this message and the other two of whom had come to destroy Sodom. For texts, see Josephus, H. Thackeray and R. Marcus eds., 8 vols., Loeb Classical Library series (London: Heinemann, 1926-1943).

²Ch. 25.

³Ch. 48, par. 9. The commentator says that we get the names of the months of the year and also of the angels from Babylon.

Arab.¹ Abraham looked to see if the Shekinah waited for them, in order to judge for himself if they were worthy people. He also wanted to see if they were polite to each other, and, if they were, then he would think them to be gentlemen. Having been so impressed, he ran to greet them when he saw them come close.

The related problem of entertaining non-Jewish visitors while avoiding any pagan practices² is addressed in Baba Mezia 86b. When he offers to have water brought for foot washing the travellers ask Abraham, "Do you suspect us to be Arabs, who worship the dust of their feet? Already Ishmael has come from you." We do not know when the supposed Arab superstitions about foot dust would have been known to Jewish people. In any case, this passage credits Abraham with concern for religious purity and consistently smooth hospital-

¹In Kiddushin 32b a discussion about certain parental duties evolves into a discussion on questions of public acts of respect toward Rabbis. One of the examples used was a tale about several Rabbis at table, being served by one of their most respected Rabbis. Upon protesting that they were not worthy to be so served, the ministering Rabbi said that Abraham had served others,

and should you say that they appeared to him as ministering Angels, they appeared to him only as Arabs.

A similar invocation of Abraham's politeness is recorded in Yalkut, Exod., 229.

²We have already mentioned the matter of how Targums Neofiti and Fragmentary try to modify the bow of Abraham so as to avoid any false impression along these lines.

ity¹ in that foot washing was a very welcome aspect of hospitality.

Abraham's polite scrutiny of his guests and his prudent and generous washing of their feet are sometimes contrasted with Lot's more limited actions.

In Kallah Rabbati² we again have the details of exactly which angel had which duties, etc., but here a further item is mentioned. In Gen. 19, 2, Lot, in his invitation to the two angels, invites them to spend the night and then to wash.³ The commentator asks, "why did they not wash at the start, as did Abraham?" The answer is that Lot feared for his own safety from the townspeople, if he were found being hospitable. Perhaps in the morning, if the visitors were seen with dust on their feet, people would say that they were just coming into the city.

In the same verse in Gen. 19, the angels show their

¹In Tanhuma תנחומא par. 10, there is a discussion on the different times when acacia wood is mentioned in the Bible. The tree under which the angels reclined is thought to have been an acacia because of the merits of Abraham. In Zohar 102b we are told that Abraham had a special miraculous type of tree which he planted each time he moved (same tree or seeds?), but which flourished especially in Canaan. The tree would spread wide and healthy when believers were around it but would droop when an unbeliever came near. Abraham's invitation to the visitors to recline under the tree is therefore seen as an additional precaution on his part.

²Ch. 7, according to Higger's text and enumeration, in Massekhtot Kallah (New York: Debe Rabanan, 1936).

³This is the sequence of the verbs; i.e., there is no grammatical foundation for saying and then.

reluctance to accept Lot's offer, whereas those who visited Abraham accepted his good wishes easily. This teaches us that we may show reluctance to an inferior person, but not to a great man.¹ In Yalkut, Gen. 84, Abraham's care in the matter of foot washing is seen as avoiding any question of idolatry, whereas Lot only offers it as a customary item of hospitality. The angels who visited Lot knew that their feet were dirty, but they resisted the urge to ask for water.

Yalkut, Gen. 82 mentions that Abraham saw the Shekinah as well as the angels, their names and duties, their reluctance later on with Lot. Rashi notes their duties, that they were of peaceful intent in Abraham's eyes, and that Lot was not overly concerned with possible questions of religious purity such as the dust on the feet of his visitors. Zohar mentions Abraham's running to greet the guests,² the fact that he quickly had their feet washed,³ and that his motivation in all this was entirely a great concern for ritual purity.⁴

¹Very similar traditions are recounted in Derek Eretz Rabbah Ch. 4 (in Higger, this is Pirke Ben Azzai, Ch. 2). See M. Higger, The Treatises Derek Eretz (New York: Debe Rabanan, 1935). Here Abraham speaks to the chief angel in v. 3, asking him to wait until he can take leave of the Shekinah. The Shekinah had come at the same time as the angels. Here one text (Soncino) cites Gen. 18, 3, while another (Higger) cites Gen. 17, 22, which describes God taking His leave, several days before. Thus we really have two interpretations: that Abraham kept God waiting while he entertained (Higger); and that he kept his guests waiting for at least a short time while he listened to God (Soncino).

²101a.

³107a.

⁴102ab.

In considering the angels, Abraham, and Lot in these passages, I think Abraham alone emerges as a true "moral type" --his discrete scrutiny of guests and his concern for religious purity are meant for imitation by later Jews. The angels' deliverance of good news first and their reluctance toward an inferior person (Lot) are small examples of everyday practice-- i.e., they are small examples of the actualizing of Scripture. Lot's lesser interests in matters of hospitality and purity are really only foils to Abraham's greater example.

C) Other themes related to verses 2 and 3

In verse 3 Abraham refers to himself as "your servant." This word has deep religious meanings and is used of many Old Testament figures. For instance in Sifre, Deut.,¹ the writer prepares a list of figures who called themselves servants and were also called servants by God.² The list starts here with Gen. 18, 3 and God's use of the term with regard to Abraham in Gen. 26, 24.³

¹לְחֵלְלֵנוּ par. 27, commenting on Deut. 3, 24, in which Moses calls himself a servant of God. Sifre references for Deuteronomy will be found in Siphre d'be Rab, L. Finkelstein and H. S. Horovitz, eds. (Berlin, 1939).

²He also lists those who called themselves servants but were not additionally so designated by God, and vice versa.

³In Psalms Rabbah, Ch. 18, par. 4, a reference to David as God's servant starts that author off on a similar list. Yalkut, Deut. 814 repeats the item from Sifre, and another case is had in Yalkut, Joshua 4 (on Joshua 1, 2). Yalkut, Gen. 82 mentions a list as well as Yalkut, Isaia 438 (on Isaia, 53, 11-12).

The opening phrase of verse 2, "he raised his eyes and saw" came to be listed with other significant instances of seeing. In Esther Rabbah¹ there is occasion for such a listing. Here evil men see evil things: the sons of God see the daughters of men (Gen. 6, 2); Ham sees Noah naked (Gen. 9, 22); Esau sees unacceptable women (Gen. 28, 8), and so on. Good men see pleasant sights: Abraham sees the three visitors; he sees a ram (Gen. 22, 13); Jacob sees a well (Gen. 29, 2), and so on.²

These cross references concerning the titles and actions of biblical persons would obviously belong to Patte's category of telescoping to "closed" past events. That is to say, the individuals involved are not really being presented to us as moral types in any detail.

5. Preparing the Bread

Abraham's generosity toward his guests will now involve his household in the preparations. He first asks his wife Sarah to make fresh bread.³

¹Ch. 7, par. 9, on Esther 3, 5, "Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow."

²This theme is repeated in Yalkut, Esther 1054; Yalkut, Num. 765, on Balak seeing Israel's deeds (Num. 22, 2); and Yalkut, Job 908, inspired by Job 22, 16.

³Almost all the Targums retain the exact measurement of three seahs of flour (approximately 20 liters volume); different words are used to describe the kind of bread product to be made, but they all seem to indicate kinds which would be made with little or no leaven and more heat contact. This is understandable since full-leavened loaves take a longer time to prepare.

In Genesis Rabbah¹ we find some comments on Gen. 14, 13, wherein we are told that a certain messenger came to Abraham. The tradition is that this messenger was Og (עוג), the same Og who had dealt with Moses. He was called עוג because he came and found Abraham working at the prescribed breads (במצות עוגות). The presumption in calling these prescribed is that they are prescribed for use in the Passover period.²

The flour (קמח) used to make the bread is further specified to be fine flour (סלת). In Baba Mezia 87a it is pointed out that Abraham had to demand this flour, since Sarah was less than impressed with his visitors. Rab Isaac said, "A woman sizes up travellers better than a man does." Rashi also mentions that the use of fine meal flour is an extra touch on Abraham's part.

A fairly common technique used by the Rabbis is to expand amounts and numbers when they help to make a point. So here we find a tendency to elaborate on the already large amount of flour to be used. Genesis Rabbah³ says that Sarah made 9 seahs worth of goods: 3 for עוגות, and 3 for חביץ, a

¹Ch. 42, par. 8.

²Perhaps that Passover overtone is also conveyed by the same word עוגה in the MT. Another hint at this Passover theme is found in Mekilta Yohai ב"ר Ch. 12, par. 39 (on Exod. 12, 39); the Israelites baked the dough which they had brought from Egypt into עוגות מצות not cakes but scones אין עוגה אלא חררה כענין. Gen. 18, 6 is cited here to explain the exact kind of bread meant.

³Ch. 48, par. 12.

kind of honey cake, and 3 for other delicacies (מִיֵּי חֶמֶד (סולוֹטוֹמִיָּה). It also adds the remark that it was the Pass-over season.¹

In the biblical account, at verse 8, it is mentioned that Abraham took meat and milk and curds (or cheese)² and served it to the guests. The bread is not specifically mentioned here. Any omission such as this is fair game for speculation. In Baba Mezia 87a it is explained that Abraham would eat non-ritual foods only when they were ritually clean, and Sarah, before the meal had been served, had admitted to being in a menstrual period. Thus Abraham would not serve the now unclean עֲוֵנוֹת.³ Note that, while he and Sarah would have been very surprised at her menstruating, Abraham carries on with his visitors as usual.

In Genesis Rabbah⁴ this theory (that Sarah admitted her condition and the breads were therefore considered unclean) is mentioned and refuted. The Rabbis said

¹Yalkut, Gen. 82 mentions the 9 seahs and their use and the Passover time.

²There is a proverb which uses the words חֶמֶד and חֶלֶב which we have in Gen. 18, 8; Proverbs 30, 33, "If milk is pressed, curds result." Midrash Mishle 30, 33 and Yalkut, Proverbs 964 note Abraham's use of these foods when serving his visitors.

³Similar mention of this "unclean breads" tradition is found in Pirke Eliezer Ch. 36 and Yalkut, Gen. 82.

⁴Ch. 48, par. 14.

Surely he brought the bread to them for he brought to them things which he had not promised (e.g., milk and cheese); how much the more things which he had promised earlier.

Up to this point in this group of traditions about the bread we have seen telescoping references to the fact that God and the angels appeared at Mamre at Passover time,¹ and further praise for Abraham's hospitality. In his wish for fine flour,² his having 9³ seahs of baked goods made, and his concern for ritual cleanliness, we see Abraham as a moral type of hospitality and religious purity for others to imitate. Now let us examine some of the Rabbinic comments which concern themselves with "closed" biblical cross-references.

A purely phonetic connection can be found in Numbers 33, 13-14. Here mention is made of a place called אלרש where the chosen people once encamped. This is so because of the merits of Sarah, of whom we know that Abraham said to her, "knead" (לרש).⁴

The phrase "refresh your hearts" in verse 5 is rare in Hebrew, and this is often pointed out. Thus, in Genesis

¹Perhaps the פטירין of Targum Neofiti and Ps.-Jonathan's "time of the feast" are also indicators of this tradition.

²Sarah is a foil on this point.

³Even 3 seahs seems an excessive amount if one is in a hurry to prepare a meal.

⁴This is from Tanhuma B בשלח par. 23. It is also found in Genesis Rabbah Ch. 48, par. 12 and Yalkut, Gen. 82.

Rabbah¹ Rab Isaac says that a bit of bread strengthens the heart; this exact phrase is found once in the Torah, once in the prophets (Judges 19, 5), and once in the writings (Psalm 104, 15).²

In Qohelet Rabbah* (on Ecc. 1, 16) we find a list of actions which the heart is described as doing in the Bible. The heart can hear (1 Kings 3, 9); it can walk (2 Kings 5, 26); it can be refreshed (Gen. 18, 5).

An orthographic item which the Rabbis commented on was the fact that the unpointed word for heart was spelled with only one ך in this verse (לִבָּם). In Genesis Rabbah,³ Rab observes that "this proves there is no tempter ruling over the angels." Rashi makes the same observation.⁴ From other sources we know that the word heart written with two ךs was thought to indicate the conflict between good and base desires, which is the more usual state of the average person.

¹Ch. 48, par. 11.

²The same three biblical verses are mentioned in Psalms Rabbah, Ch. 104, par. 12, on Psalm 104, 15; on the same Psalms verse in Yalkut, Psalms 862; on the Judges verse in Yalkut, Judges 75; Yalkut, Gen. 82, and Rashi.

³Ch. 48, par. 11.

⁴In Yalkut, Psalms 757 (on Psalm 48, 14) we have a different case where לִבָּם has only one ך. Here we learn that there is no evil desire in the time to come, as can also be seen in Gen. 18, 5. Another instance would be Rashi on 1 Chron. 28, 9, "serve God with a whole heart." Rashi notes that the word is written with one ך and is in the singular. At Gen. 18, 5, the word לִבָּם has a plural suffix but has the one ך which proves that the angels who visited Abraham really had "one heart."

We have a few instances of a cross-reference between Gen. 18, 4, "I will fetch a morsel of bread," and Isaia 33, 16, "his bread will be given him." If Mann¹ is correct in proposing Isaia 33, 17-24 and 35, 10 to have been the Haftarah for the Pentateuchal Seder containing the Mamre story, then these citations have a truly liturgical origin. Thus in Genesis Rabbah² we have this parallel in a beautiful chain of parallels between Isaia 33, 15-17 and traditional references to Abraham, ending with Isaia 33, 17, "your eyes will see the king in his beauty," paralleled to Gen. 18, 1, "And the Lord appeared to him."³

6. Preparing the Meat

The main item in Abraham's generous meal was the freshly killed meat dish.⁴ Just as there was a Rabbinic tendency to exaggerate the amount and kind of bread, so too they speculated on how much meat Abraham served. In Baba Mezia 86b we read that Rab proposed that Abraham had chosen 3 calves

¹Jacob Mann, The Bible as Read and Preached in the Old Synagogue, vol. 1, p. 134.

²Ch. 48, par. 6.

³So also in Exodus Rabbah Ch. 25, par. 8 (where Isaia 33, 17 is paralleled to Moses, not Abraham) and Yalkut, Gen. 82. In all these cases Abraham is the host and the bread is for him to give out. There is no implication that the "him" of Isaia 33, 16 is God.

⁴The Targums do not elaborate beyond the MT except that Ps.-Jonathan adds a term to describe the dish as "prepared meats (תבשילין)."

since the phrase בן-בקר רך וטוב could be taken as a series of substantives in apposition, i.e., "a calf, a tender calf, and a good calf." Other Rabbis suggested that there might have been two calves, a tender one and a good one. In either case the only apparent objection that could be raised is that in verses 7 and 8 all the references to the servant and to the animal are in the singular. To answer this point the theory was advanced that each calf was given to a servant in turn and each cooked portion was brought out as it was ready. A possible reason for slaughtering 3 animals might be so that each visitor could have a tongue with mustard sauce. In Genesis Rabbah¹ the assumption is that there was one calf. It was not large but rather a tender calf; even though it was young it was not tasteless, but very good. The servant to whom Abraham gave the calf was Ishmael,² his son by Hagar. Ishmael was being trained in hospitality.³

There are several rich traditions in Rabbinic literature concerning the cave and field of Machpelah (Gen. 23). In Pirke Eliezer⁴ we find a connection to Machpelah by means of

¹Ch. 48, par. 13.

²Some of the Targums had mentioned Ishmael with reference to v. 10.

³Yalkut, Gen. 82 mentions almost all these traditions; the three calves, the mustard sauce, Ishmael's duties, etc. Rashi mentions the three tongues in mustard and that Ishmael was the servant boy.

⁴Ch. 36.

the calf! When Abraham went to catch the calf it escaped from him and ran and entered the cave of Machpelah. Abraham followed the calf into the cave and found Adam and Eve lying in state, and he determined to buy the cave at a future time. He then returned with the calf and went on with his preparations.¹

Thus in the matter of the meat preparations we again find a stress on Abraham's generous hospitality. The references to the cave of Machpelah should be seen as telescoping references less integral to Jewish appreciation of the Mamre account than those concerning circumcision and Passover.

In addition to these considerations on the calf theme, we have about two dozen associations which are almost entirely based on the mention of the word calf or a synonym such as bull, ox, or the like. I will mention these closed biblical cross-references here in some detail simply to show the range of biblical verses over which such associations can take place.

In Tanhuma² the commentator is discussing the story of Dinah (Gen. 34) and Shechem, the son of Hamor. We are re-

¹There is also an allusion to this cave in Aggadath Bereshith, Perek 34 having to do with the flour used for the bread. I have not worked the translation out fully, but it seems that the flour was grown in a wheat field near or on top of the cave. See S. Buber, Aggadath Bereshith (Cracow: J. Fischer, 1902). Zohar 127b has the same story about the runaway calf, and Yalkut, Gen. 82 mentions it.

²תנ"ח sect. 7.

minded of a nickname for Shechem, namely, "bull," and that Abraham ran to the herd. In context it is pretty clear that what is meant is that just as Abraham had quickly dispatched the calf, so too the sons of Jacob would quickly kill Shechem.¹

In Tanhuma B² a young bull must be sacrificed at ordination ceremonies (Exod. 29, 1); we use a young bull because Abraham ran to the herd. In Leviticus Rabbah,³ we read that Aaron must use a young bull in Temple sin offerings (Lev. 16, 3), because Abraham ran to the herd.

Another item in Leviticus has to do with the minimum age of animals for sacrifice (Lev. 22, 27). This verse is tied to Gen. 18, 7 in Leviticus Rabbah,⁴ Pesikta Rab Kahana,⁵ and Yalkut.⁶

Numbers also has several texts involving the sacrifice

¹The author also leads up to a horrendous pun involving Deut. 22, 10, "You shall not plow with an ox and ass (בשור ובהמר) together."

²חצוה par. 10.

³Ch. 21, par. 11. This reference is also in Pesikta Rab Kahana אמרי מות piska 26. Buber had placed it in the former position in one of his editions. The same Aaronic sacrifice (Lev. 16, 3) is related to Gen. 18, 7 in Pesikta Rabbati* Ch. 47, par. 4, and Yalkut, Lev. 571.

⁴Ch. 27, par. 9.

⁵Ch. 9, par. 9.

⁶Yalkut, Lev. 643. Other Leviticus allusions can be found in Tanhuma אמרי Part 3, par. 12, and Tanhuma B אמרי par. 16.

of bulls. Numbers Rabbah*¹ alludes to Num. 7, 15 and that Abraham ran to the herd.²

There is even a more phonetic allusion in Song of Songs 7, 6, "the king is held in the tresses (ברחמים)." The king is God and the woman is Israel. The king allows himself to be held captive by the merits of Abraham, who ran (רחט) to the herd.³

In Pesikta Rabbati*⁴ we find a tale about the patriarchs each begging God to delay destroying the Temple (commenting on Jeremiah 37, 1-2). Isaac asks that Nisan, whose zodiacal sign is the lamb, should be spared the disgrace of having the Temple destroyed during that time. Likewise Abraham pleads for his month Iyar, whose sign is the bull.

I would like to end this section on a more spiritual note, so I saved the best of these cross-references till last. In Isaia Ch. 66 we read

- 2b This is the man to whom I will look, he that is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word.
- 3a He who slaughters an ox is like him who kills a man;

¹Ch. 13, par. 14.

²Rashi does the same at Num. 7, 21. On Num. 7, 51, we have Numbers Rabbah Ch. 14, par. 5. Yalkut, Num. 714 is related to Num. Ch. 7 and Rashi has the same remark on Num. 28, 19. Tanhuma תנחומא par. 13 is in a similar vein.

³This is from Song of Songs Rabbah* Ch. 7, par. 6. The same can be found in Leviticus Rabbah* Ch. 31, par. 4.

⁴Ch. 27/28, par. 1.

3b He who sacrifices a lamb, like him who breaks a dog's neck.

In Tanhuma B¹ and Yalkut² we have the immediate reference to Abraham running to the herd with regard to the first half of 3a of Isaia 66. However in Aggadath Bereshith³ there is a much more developed set of parallels. Abraham is the man to whom God looked, when He came to him at Mamre. Abraham trembled at God's word in Gen. 17, 27, where we read of how quickly he circumcised himself and Ishmael and all his men on the same day. Abraham slaughtered the calf for the three visitors, but he also is the one who sacrifices a lamb, as we know from Gen. 22, 8, when he had just been spared from killing Isaac.

Aggadath continues to recount how God came to visit the sick man at Mamre, how He told him to stay seated because of his pain, how Abraham would be a sign to future generations to stay seated in Synagogue and School, and so on. The angels ask God when He proposes the visit, "O Lord, what is man that thou dost regard him (Psalm 144, 3)." Psalm 25, 10 is used to describe Abraham sitting at the door of the tent; "All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies." And when

¹ תנחומא par. 2.

² Yalkut, Isaia 511.

³ Ch. 19.

God tells Abraham to stay seated, He says, "Sit at my right hand . . . (Psalm 110, 1)."

7. The Merits of Abraham

A) General merit framework

The Rabbinic sense of corporate religious identity can be very clearly seen in their concept of merit. Put simply, it means that the good deeds and faith of one person can bring down God's mercy and love on other people now or in the future.¹ Many Rabbis saw the totality of Abraham's activities at Mamre as earning a great deal of merit which God saw fit to apply to Abraham's descendants. We shall begin by looking at some of the more general remarks about Abraham's deeds that day and then come to details.

The essence of Abraham's deeds at Mamre was the virtue of hospitality. The practice of this virtue is superior to receiving God Himself. In Shabbath 127a the position is taken that in verse 3 of our passage Abraham is asking God to wait while he entertains his visitors. God does wait, causing the writer to remark that His patience is very unlike that of men. A man of high rank would have been slighted to be kept waiting like this.

¹Thus Isaac's and Abraham's pleas for their months not to be associated with the destruction of the Temple and the analogy involving Song of Songs 7, 6 (mentioned above, near the end of the last grouping) are examples of the patriarchs' influence before God.

In Psalms Rabbah¹ we find that God is humble; He waits while the travellers eat. In Leviticus Rabbah² we find a list of people to whom God has spoken in the past. He called to Adam, His tenant-farmer (Gen. 3, 8); He called to Noah, His herdsman (Gen. 8, 15); He spoke to Abraham, His host; so surely He will speak to Moses, His covenant mediator.

In Leviticus Rabbah³ the fourfold praises of Psalm 18, 26 are applied to Abraham. We find the following on "with the sincere, You are sincere." Abraham's plea to God, in verse 3 of the Mamre story, that God wait awhile, was very sincere. Abraham went on to be most courteous to the visitors. God waited sincerely, as we know from Gen. 18, 22.⁴

In Yalkut, 2 Sam. 161, Abraham's request for God to wait is called an act of piety or kindness.⁵

These five examples highlight the esteem which the virtue of hospitality had for the Rabbinic audiences. God waits for Abraham humbly and sincerely and then speaks to His

¹Ch. 18, par. 29, on Psalm 18, 36, "Your humility has made me great."

²Ch. 1, par. 9; the commentary is on Lev. 1, 1, "The Lord called Moses."

³Ch. 11, par. 5.

⁴In this verse there is a Tikkun Soferim; God actually waited for Abraham. Almost the exact same parallels are made in Psalms Rabbah Ch. 18, par. 22. Rab Simon states clearly that the Shekinah waited for Abraham until he left the angels.

⁵The merits so gained were applied to David (2 Sam. 22, 18).

host, because of His respect for this same virtue. However, God's response to Abraham's practice of hospitality goes far beyond merely waiting for him and then speaking to him as an individual. Let us see what God did for Abraham's descendants.

B) More detailed merit parallels

In Baba Mezia 86b we have two groups of Scripture parallels depicting Abraham's actions and later graces given by God to the Chosen People.

In the first group let us consider four things which Abraham did himself and one action which he had his servant do.

Abraham's actions

Abraham ran to fetch a calf.

Abraham brought milk and curds.

He served¹ (TDV) them under the tree.

He went with them to escort them.

God's actions during the Exodus

A wind went forth from the Lord and brought quails (Num. 11, 31).

Behold, I will rain bread from heaven on you (Exod. 16, 4).

Behold, I will stand (TDV) before you there on the rock at Horeb (Exod. 17, 6).

The Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud (Exod. 13, 21).

¹The act of standing by is commented on by Rashi. He cites Gen. 24, 30, where Abraham's servant is described as standing by the camels at the well. This standing by is the same as caring for the animals. In the same way Abraham's standing by is caring. Maimonides, in Guide* Part 1, sect. 13, discussing different levels of meaning in the verb by, observes that its use in Gen. 18, 8 refers to the simplest sense of rising and standing.

Abraham's servant

Abraham had a servant bring water.

God's servant

God said to Moses, "you shall strike the rock" (Exod. 17, 6).

The second tradition has a slightly different set of parallels. For Abraham's standing by the tree the second group uses the image of the pillar (עמוד עץ) of Exod. 13, 21; for the water which was given the guests the parallel is the well of Miriam.¹

In Tosefta² we have a longer list of parallels.

Abraham's actions

Three times Abraham runs or hastens; to greet the visitors, to fetch the calf, and to speak to Sarah.

Abraham bowed to the ground.

Abraham gave them water.

Abraham had them rest under a tree.

Abraham provided food.

God's actions

There are three verbs in Deut. 33, 2, "The Lord came from Sinai, and dawned from Seir upon us; He shone forth from Mount Paran . . ."

"Kings shall bow down to you, with their faces to the ground." Isaia 49, 23.

God provided a well at Beer (Num. 21, 18).

God provided seven clouds of glory³ for His children in the desert.

God provided tasty manna (Num. 11, 8).

¹This last non-biblical tradition has to do with a miraculous well which followed (reappeared to ?) the Chosen People during the years in the desert.

²סנהדרין perek 4. See S. Lieberman, The Tosefta (New York: JTSA, 1955-19).

³Non-biblical traditions expanded on the pillar of cloud theme.

Abraham's actions

Abraham fetched a calf.

Abraham stood and served.

Abraham escorted the angels.

God's actions

God provided quails (Num. 11, 31).

God passed over the marked doors (Ex. 12, 23).

God escorted His people (Deut. 2, 7).

On this list from Tosefta I would only comment that the example of God passing over marked doors seem a bit strained as a parallel. The quotation from Isaia 49 might point more to a hope for the future rather than to a past event, although the writer might have been thinking of David and Solomon.¹

¹Relatively similar lists of parallels may be found in Tanhuma וירא par. 4; Tanhuma B וירא par. 5.

In Tanhuma תצוה par. 6 and Tanhuma B תצוה par. 2 we again find comments on S.S. 7, 6, "a king is held captive in the tresses." In the former passage, God says to Israel, "I have bound myself forever to you by an oath, for whose merits? For the sake of Abraham, who twice ran before me (Gen. 18, 2 and 7)." Tanhuma B וירא par. 5 also has a very close examination of Gen. 18, 4, "let a little water be brought" which may be too detailed to go into here. In Pesikta Rabbati Ch. 14, par. 3, on the matter of sacrificing a red heifer (Num. 19, 2), we have another account of the merits gained by Abraham at Mamre. The only variations worth noting here are that for the parallel to having the angels rest under the tree we think of the booths of Lev. 23, 43, and, on the matter of the water and the calf which were part of the hospitality, there are some references to taking some of the ashes of the red heifer and making water pure with them. Another list can be found in Exodus Rabbah* Ch. 25, par. 5. Here, for the bringing of water by Abraham, we find cited Ezekiel, 16, 9. Yalkut, Exodus 228 has a full set of parallels. Yalkut, Num. 737 mentions only the quail parallel and Yalkut, Deut. 850 speaks only of the well in the desert. Another traditional list is in Mekilta Ishmael בשלח 1, par. 20.

In Leviticus Rabbah* Ch. 34, par. 8, the passage under consideration is Lev. 25, 25. This leads to some technical remarks about the duty which relatives have to make loans or other arrangements with a poor man so that his property will

The lists of parallels which we have seen so far have dealt mainly with the Exodus events, although they do have a few citations from the prophets and the Psalms. The number of parallels apparently grew and eventually came to be put into three general categories--what God did for His people in the desert, and then in the promised land, and finally what He will do for them in the time to come (Messianic future).¹ Here is the Genesis Rabbah large list.²

<u>Abraham's Actions</u>	<u>During Exodus</u>	<u>God's Actions in the Land</u>	<u>In the Future</u>
He gave water.	God gave well at Beer (Num. 21, 17)	The Promised Land has much water (Deut. 8, 7)	In the future there will be living waters (Zech. 14, 8)
He said, "wash your feet."	God washed Israel in desert (Ez. 16, 9)	"Wash yourselves" (Isaia 1, 16)	In that day the Lord shall wash away filth (Isaia 4, 4)
He offered a tree for shade.	Clouds in desert (Psalm 105, 39)	They dwelt in booths (Lev. 23, 42)	Great canopy on that day (Isaia 4, 6)

not be alienated. The question is asked, "Who showed kindness to persons not needing it?" The answer is Abraham, who hosted the angels under the tree. In reward for this kindness God gave his descendants the manna, quails, etc. Therefore, since God has so rewarded an unneeded kindness, how much the more will He reward a kindness shown to a needy relative.

¹I am making no attempt here to date the growth of the separate elements of these merit series. I am simply assuming that the Exodus themes were chief among the earlier points of comparison, based on their appearance in Baba Mezia.

²Ch., 48, par. 10.

<u>Abraham's Actions</u>	<u>During Exodus</u>	<u>God's Actions in the Land</u>	<u>In the Future</u>
He gave bread.	God gave manna (Ex. 16, 4)	A land of wheat (Deut. 8, 8)	Abundance of grain in the land (Ps. 72, 16)
He served a calf.	Quails were provided (Num. 11, 31)	There will be much cattle (Num. 32, 1)	In that day a man will keep a young cow (Isaia 7, 21)
He stood by and served.	The Lord went before them (Ex. 13, 21)	God stands in the congrega- tion (Ps. 82, 1)	The Lord will be at their head (Micah 2, 13)

In Qohelet Rabbah*¹ we have a similar list.

Confining our remarks solely to the use of the merit framework with the Mamre account, we can certainly agree with Patte's observations.² All these parallel references are closed to the present; i.e., they look to sacred events of the past or to the Messianic future. Nevertheless the base to which these parallels are telescoped remains the generous hos-

¹Qohelet Rabbah Ch. 11, par. 1. A new citation here is Joel 4, 18, "the mountains shall drip sweet wine . . ." as the future parallel to Abraham's action of bringing water (English enumeration is Joel 3, 18). Numbers Rabbah* Ch. 14, par. 2, has a similar chart, except for parallels involving the bringing of water (Exod. 6, 7 and Isaia 14, 2). Yalkut, Lev. 655 contains a list close to that in Genesis Rabbah. Yalkut, Numbers 764 lists all the parallels for the water theme only. Yalkut, Isaia 401 has a nearly complete version. Yalkut, Gen. 82 mentions that Abraham was very eager to host despite his pain, that he ran or hastened three times; it has a very full list of merit parallels for the desert, promised land, and Messianic future, and a more detailed analysis of the water parallels. Mekilta Yohai וַיֵּרָא 6, 2 mentions Abraham's hospitality to the angels in commenting on Ezekiel 20, 9.

²Patte, p. 72.

pitality of Abraham. Thus a Jewish congregation of any period, hearing a merit sermon on passages such as these, was being asked to think about a virtue, a virtue which must in some way be actualized in daily life.

C) Related theme: Abraham's generosity

In Baba Mezia 87a the contrast is made between the angels' reluctance to accept Lot's hospitality and their previous willingness to receive that of Abraham. The Rabbis conclude that one may decline invitations from an inferior but not from a great man.¹ Abraham was great because he was very generous. He promised to bring his visitors a bit of bread, but he actually laid out a full meal, including meat. Rab. Eleazar says that thus we see that just men say very little and do much.

In Aboth de Rabbi Nathan² we have this same saying about saying little and doing much. Abraham is an example of this. He brought 9 measures of flour, and 3 or 4 oxen.³ In

¹So also Rashi on Peshahim 86b.

²Ch. 13. References will be from S. Schechter, Aboth de Rabbi Nathan (Vienna, 1887. Reprinted in New York: Feldheim, 1945).

³This is the only case which I have found of an attempt to count four calves. In context, the author was trying to stress the great scale of what Abraham did. Most likely the tradition which prevailed (three calves) did so because of the three visitors and the three tongues in mustard sauce. In this account Ishmael is the servant boy.

Tanhuma¹ and Yalkut² we find much the same theme. Rashi³ says that whoever does a righteous act does a great thing, even if it is a small act.⁴

One other tradition about Abraham's generosity might fit in here. In Yalkut⁵ a description is given of Solomon's daily food provisions (1 Kings 5, 2 ff.; English enumeration 4, 22 ff.). The writer says that, in a way, Abraham did more than Solomon. There follows the standard way of indicating that Abraham really killed three calves. I would assume that the Yalkut remarks mean that relatively speaking Abraham's quantities were more lavish for his guests.

8. Did They Consume the Meal?

The biblical text states clearly that the visitors ate the meal which Abraham had prepared for them. Two of the Targums, Neofiti and Ps.-Jonathan indicate that they only ap-

¹ תנחומא par. 4.

² Yalkut, Gen. 82.

³ On Aboth de Rabbi Nathan 6a, on mishnah 15.

⁴ One other biblical event triggers this same opinion. That is the contrast between Num. 22, 17, wherein Balak promised to do great honors for Balaam, and the result in Num. 22, 40. In this last verse Rabbinic tradition was that Balak's provisions of meats were less than grand. Thus evil men like Balak promise to do a lot but they deliver very little. The opposite is true of Abraham. We find this account in Tanhuma B פלפול par. 15; Numbers Rabbah* Ch. 20, par. 17; and Yalkut, Num. 765.

⁵ Yalkut, 1 Kings 176. Also found in Yalkut, Gen. 82 and Baba Mezia 86b.

peared to eat. Eichrodt¹ suggests that the Yahwist has modified a story, originally of Canaanite provenance, having to do with a god actually eating a meal. The modification was intended to avoid syncretism in the Jahweh cultus. Could not this avoidance of any hint of syncretism have been also the conscious or unconscious intention of later advocates of the visitors only seeming to eat?

There are several other sources which follow the general trend indicated by the two Targums. In Baba Mezia 86b R. Tanhum says that when Moses ascended on high he ate no food, but when the ministering angels came down to Abraham they did eat. Then comes a remark which may or may not have been part of R. Tanhum's original contributions

. . . and they ate . . . do you really believe that? Rather consider that they appeared to be eating and drinking.

In Genesis Rabbah² we find the angels saying, "we do not eat or drink, but you (for yourself there is eating and drinking), do as you have said."

In par. 14 of the same chapter of Genesis Rabbah the analogy is again advanced that as Moses refrained from eating when on high (Deut. 9, 9), so also the angels really ate when they were here below. The objection which follows includes a little more detail.

¹Theology of the Old Testament, J. Baker, trans. (Westminster, 1961), vol. 1, 144.

²Ch. 48, par. 11.

And did they really eat? Rather they seemed to be eating. One after the other the courses were removed.¹

In Qohelet Rabbah*² some cases are mentioned in which a divine decree is apparently put aside later on. One of these decrees is that whereas heavenly beings should not eat earthly food, nevertheless Abraham's visitors ate. R. Nathan says that they pretended to eat and the courses disappeared one after the other.³

On the other hand there are several sources, in addition to the Targums, which avoid spiritualizing the matter of the eating of the meal. In Pesikta Rabbati⁴ we have a debate between the angels and God over giving the Torah to mankind. The angels want it to be kept in heaven. After several rounds of argument, God offers this rejoinder,

¹I.e., they were disposed of in a miraculous way.

²Ch. 3, par. 14. Text under study is Ecc. 3, 14.

³Basically the same idea is repeated in Exodus Rabbah* Ch. 47, par. 5 (on Exod. 34, 28). Another similar citation would be Leviticus Rabbah* Ch. 34, par. 8. Yalkut, Gen. 82 repeats several of the above traditions. It mentions that the angels said, "we do not eat or drink but . . . for yourself . . . do as you have said." It mentions that the angels appeared to eat, and that the courses of food disappeared one after the other. Rashi says that they seemed to eat. Zohar 102a says that the angels simulated eating in honor of Abraham. This simulation was as when fire invisibly consumes fire. In Zohar 104a we read that the angels pretended to eat all the food so that Abraham could gain as much merit as possible. Josephus, Antiquities 1, 11, 12, also says that the angels seemed to eat the food.

⁴Ch. 25, par. 3.

Are you the ones who fulfill the Torah? A child in Israel fulfills it better than you. Even when he comes out of elementary school, if meat and milk are both there to eat, he never drinks the milk until he has washed his hands of the meat. Yet you were sent down to Abraham; he brought meat and milk to you at the same time and you ate.¹

This argument silenced the angels momentarily, and at that moment God gave the Torah to Moses.

In Exodus Rabbah² we have a more vivid confrontation involving the angels. At the moment of the giving of the Torah, they wished to attack Moses but God made the features of Moses resemble those of Abraham. God then asked the angels, "Are you not ashamed to touch this man to whom you descended, and in whose house you ate?"

In Seder Eliyahu Rabbah³ an allusion is made to Abraham's visitors. They sat before Abraham but did not begin to eat. They did not even speak. But, for the righteousness with which Abraham was righteous, and in reward for the preparations which he had made, God opened their mouths for them and they ate.

¹The implication is that they ate both foods at the same time. A similar account is in Psalms Rabbah Ch. 8, par. 2.

²Ch. 28, par. 1.

³Ch. 12. See M. Friedmann, Seder Eliahu Rabba and Seder Eliahu Zuta (Jerusalem: Wahrmann, 1969). The discussion concerns the question of eating with Gentiles and gathering together with them. In Yalkut, Exodus 406 and Yalkut, Deut. 852 we are told clearly that the angels ate when Abraham offered them food. Yalkut, Gen. 82 reports the tradition about God opening the mouths of the angels and making them eat. Zohar 144a flatly states that they ate, in contrast to Moses who did not eat when on high.

Whether or not the angels actually consumed the meal, they partook in some way in honor of Abraham's hospitality. The arguments which God uses against the angels, with regard to giving the Torah to men, exemplify His love for men and His dominion over the angels. The mention of the law about not eating meat and milk together would be another example of telescoping to a specific Jewish praxis.

9. The whereabouts of Sarah

Having finished their meal, the angels proceed to their mission of announcing the coming of the son to Abraham and Sarah. They first ask Abraham where his wife is, and he replies that she is inside the tent. In the MT this exchange seems to involve only the three visitors and Abraham himself.

The Rabbinic interpretations of this scene vary. In Baba Mezia 87a three opinions are offered. Sarah was modest and kept from the visitors, as was the proper custom in the Middle East; the angels asked only in order to make her even more beloved by her husband as he would reflect on her modesty; or they asked of her whereabouts so that they could send her the wine cup of blessing traditionally served at the end of the meal.¹

¹In Genesis Rabbah Ch. 48, par. 15, the Rabbis quote Jud. 5, 24 and compare Sarah with Jael, most blessed of tent-dwelling women. In Psalms Rabbah Ch. 128, par. 3 (on Psalm 128, 3 "Your wife will be a fruitful vine within your house"), Sarah is mentioned as one who was modest in her tent. In Yalkut, Exod. 169 Moses' meeting with his future wife is recalled and it is said that he acquired a modest wife by the

In Yebamoth 77a we find another confirmation of the general principle that women should stay secluded. The Talmudic context is the prohibition of marriage with Ammonites and Moabites. Some Rabbis felt that this restriction applied only to marrying Ammonite and Moabite men, since in the prohibition, as written in Deut, 23, the men are accused of having refused hospitality to the Israelites at one time in the past. Their women, however, had not the same obligations to meet men publicly. The text reads

It is customary for a man to host; it is not customary for a woman to do so. It is for them to host--men to greet men and women to greet women.

A few lines later in Yebamoth 77a the biblical citations of Gen. 18, 9 and Psalm 45, 14, "All glorious is the king's daughter within" are used to supplement the remarks about the modesty of women.¹

By contrast, Tanhuma² suggests that Sarah was often secluded in order to hide her shame at childlessness. After giving Hagar to Abraham, Sarah was secluded in her tent for a long time and she foresaw that angels would appear to her someday.

merits of Sarah. Yalkut, Psalms 881 repeats the essay on the fruitful vine of Psalm 128.

¹Yalkut, Deut. 933 repeats most of this in connection with Deut. 23 and the original grievance against the Ammonites and Moabites.

² שרה par. 4.

In Yalkut,¹ we have a discussion on Num. 9, 10 which specifies that anyone on a long journey must still observe Passover. How much the more for anyone near to home. Sarah was very devoted to her home and when the angels asked where she was they already knew the answer.²

These comments, focusing mainly on Sarah's modesty with regard to male strangers and her devotion to the home, would be further examples of the use of a biblical person as a moral type. The references to Passover and the wine cup of blessing would be other telescoping references; the mention of this query as one of God's dialogues with Abraham seems to be just a closed cross-reference. It would also lend a little support to the LXX rendering of this line.

10.. Puncta extraordinaria

In the present MT of Gen. 18, 9 the word "to him" of the opening, "They said to him" has a point superscribed over each of the four letters. These points are called extraordi-

¹Yalkut, Numbers 722.

²My copy of Yalkut reads שהיו יודעין היכן הוא, but I assume this last is a scribal or printing error for הוא. In Tanhuma B שרה par. 3, the many dialogues of Abraham and God are listed, among them this one in Gen. 18, 9. Yalkut, Gen. 82 mentions the exemption for Ammonite and Moabite women, and that the angels really knew Sarah's whereabouts but wanted to remind Abraham of her modesty. Rashi mentions her modesty and then goes on to detail some rules about how a guest should inquire after his host and hostess. Zohar 101b mentions Sarah's modesty but says that the angels did not know where she was. They wanted to be sure where she was because their instructions were to deliver the message to Abraham alone.

nary, for want of a better term. The Massorah Parva apparatus mentions that there are ten cases of puncta extraordinaria in the Pentateuch. Their origin and significance are lost to modern scholars. Sometimes they call attention to an unusual spelling or usage but there are not enough cases to make clear categorizations. Here the best guess is that the tendency would have been for scribes to drop the entire word "to him" since context indicates very clearly that Abraham is the only possible addressee. Thus the puncta extraordinaria would have kept scribal attention on the word and it would not have been lost in copying.

The Rabbis looked for symbolic meanings in these relatively rare markings. Masseketh Soferim¹ simply states that the ך, ם, and ן are to be faithfully dotted every time the text is copied, without question.²

However, in Aboth Rabbi Nathan³ we are told that the visitors knew where Sarah was but they asked Abraham out of politeness. Abraham was pleased to reflect on her modesty. Thus the points stress that Abraham alone was asked.⁴

¹Ch. 6, rule 3.

²From all the Rabbinic comments on this word it seems that in very early manuscripts the ך either did not have one of these points or that its point was ignored.

³Ch. 34.

⁴In Sifre Num. בהעלתך par. 69 mention is made of a punctum on the final ך of רחקה from Num. 9, 10, about a person on a long journey observing Passover. Sifre references to Numbers are from H. S. Horovitz, Siphre de'be Rab (Leipzig,

There is one other possibility. The dotted letters could have a meaning by themselves. In Baba Mezia 87a it is remarked that the dotted letters spell ויהי which means "where is he?" It is then possible that the text contains a shorthand way of stating that Sarah was also asked the whereabouts of Abraham. Thus it is proper to ask after a hostess from her husband and to ask after a host from his wife.¹

11. The Promise of a Son

In verse 10 the speaker promises Abraham that he and Sarah would have a male child. In verse 14, after the initial shock of the news has worn off, he repeats the essentials of the promise. In reflecting on this great grace, the Rabbis naturally considered verses 10 and 14 to be one expression of God's love and so it will not matter if we combine comments on both verses here.

1917). In noting this punctum the comments lead into a listing of other instances of puncta such as Gen. 18, 9. It is quite possible that this is the basis for the connection noted previously in Yalkut, Num. 722 on Sarah's devotion to home and Passover. A very similar list is occasioned by another punctum in Num 3, 39; this is recalled in Numbers Rabbah* ch. 3, par. 13.

¹This tradition could be at the base of Rashi's remarks about how a guest should inquire after his host and hostess. The business of taking the letters with puncta to have meaning by themselves is spelled out a little more clearly in Genesis Rabbah Ch. 48, par. 15. In any case where the dotted letters form the majority of the letters in a word, one may interpret the dotted letters. Here, just as they said to Abraham, "where is Sarah?" so they said to Sarah, "where is Abraham?" Yalkut, Gen. 82, Rashi, and Zohar 101b all retell this ויהי tradition.

This was not the only promise of a son made to Abraham. In Gen. 15, 4-5, Jahweh had promised Abraham that his descendants would be more numerous than the stars. God said at that time, "Look (הבט-נא) toward heaven." In Rabbinic traditions הבט has the meaning of looking down, so the explanation was that Abraham had been taken up to heaven to receive that initial promise. The fulfillment of the promises of Genesis 15 and 18 occurred with Isaac's birth in Gen. 21, 1.¹

In Genesis Rabbah*² on Psalm 119, 89, "Your word stands firm in heaven," the two promises about the birth of Isaac are recalled. In the next section of the same source we find Solomon's prayer when dedicating the Temple, "Lord, . . . what you did declare to him with your mouth, with your hand you have done it today." The two parts of this verse are interpreted as referring to Gen. 18, 10 and Gen. 21, 1, respectively.³

In Psalms Rabbah⁴ we study Psalm 80, 15, "Look down from heaven . . . have regard for this vine." God looked down .

¹Yalkut, Gen. 91 (on Gen. 21, 1) notes the promise made in Gen. 18, 14.

²Ch. 53, par. 4.

³Very similar applications are in Pesikta Rabbati, Ch. 42, par. 2. Solomon's prayer is from 1 Kings 8, 24.

⁴Ch. 80, par. 7.

when He made the promise to Abraham and Sarah, and He had regard when Isaac was born.

Other places than Gen. 21, 1 serve to remind one of the graciousness of God toward Abraham. In Genesis Rabbah¹ we find comments on Jacob wrestling with the angel. Jacob says that he will not let the angel go without a blessing from him. Jacob says, "the angels who came to Abraham did not leave him without giving a blessing." The wrestling angel replied, "They were sent for that reason, but I was not sent for that reason."

The references to Gen. 15 and 21, I Kings 8, Psalms 80 and 119, and even to Gen. 32, remind us that God freely promised the conception and birth of Isaac and freely brought it to pass. The use of Solomon's prayer from I Kings 8 may seem a little strange but, as we shall see below, this event was telescoped to Nisan (as also was the Mamre account); so a possible reason for the connection is uncovered.

As we saw in reviewing the Targums and versions, some of the paraphrases for כָּעַתָּ חַיִּים can be understood as meaning "at this time next year." Further, Ps.-Jonathan mentions that it will be the time of a feast.

The feast almost certainly is Passover, a time to which our passage has been telescoped by many devices. We find in the Rabbinic traditions a telescoping of the Passover

¹Ch. 78, par. 2.

season (held in the month Nisan), the promise made at Mamre, and Isaac's birth a year later.

Thus, in Seder Olam Rabbah,¹ we find a tribute to the month Nisan. During Nisan the messengers came to our father Abraham to announce to him that in the same period of the coming year Isaac would be born.

In Tanhuma B² we read that God made a mark on the wall for Sarah and said, "at the return of the sun to this spot, you will have a child." Much the same account can be found in Pesikta Rabbati:³ Isaac was born in the same month, Nisan, in which the Temple⁴ was dedicated.⁵ We know this because Sarah was making Passover עומר. The angels made a mark⁶ on the wall and said that when the sun returned to

¹Start of Ch. 5. See B. Ratner, Seder Olam Rabbah (Rome: Vilna, 1894).

²וירא par. 36.

³Ch. 6, sect. 5.

⁴Rabbinic tradition used Exod. 40, 2, interpolating this date between the times mentioned in I Kings 6, 38 and 8, 2. E.g., Pesikta Rabbati Ch. 6, sect. 5.

⁵There is another view (Pesikta Rabbati Ch. 5, sect. 7, working on Genesis Rabbah Ch. 53, par. 7) that God chose first to appear in a tabernacle on earth in honor of Isaac, in the same month as Isaac was born, because of a play on Isaac's name (his birth ushers in a new law--circumcision).

⁶Presumably the mark on the wall is a play on חיה of כעת חיה and the Hebrew word מחיה, as used in Lev. 13, 10 and 13, 24.

that spot a year later, Isaac would be born.¹

12. The Promise Overheard

As the speaker was talking to Abraham, we are told that Sarah was listening to their conversation from the tent door. The Rabbis are inclined to consider this to be eavesdropping or at least excessive curiosity. The topic comes up either in lists of womanly shortcomings gleaned from the Bible, or in discussions about the creation of Eve from Adam's rib.

In Genesis Rabbah*² we are told that God did not fashion Eve from the head of Adam, lest she be proud or frivolous; He did not fashion her from Adam's eyes, lest she ogle; nor from his ear, lest she be an eavesdropper. Yet, woman is proud and frivolous and an ogler (Isaia 3, 16); she is an eavesdropper, as when we see Sarah listening to Abraham and his visitors.³

In Genesis Rabbah*⁴ the weaknesses of women are mentioned. Women are greedy (Eve eats the apple, Gen. 3, 6);

¹Yalkut, Gen. 82 also says that the messengers came at Passover time. Yalkut, I Kings 184 mentions the Passover bread, Nisan, and the dedication of the Temple.

²Ch. 18, par. 2.

³God instead fashions Eve from the rib, since this is the most modest part of the body; even when a person is naked, the rib is still covered.

⁴Ch. 45, par. 5, in discussing the enmity between Sarah and Hagar.

they like to eavesdrop (Mamre example); they are lazy (Abraham orders Sarah to bake bread). Much the same comments are in Genesis Rabbah*¹ 80, 5.

We mentioned earlier that some of the Targums had Ishmael present with Sarah. In Genesis Rabbah*² the commentator also understands that Ishmael is present. He was there on account of "the private meeting." This might refer to social custom which would not have allowed Sarah to be alone near a guest.

The same section of Genesis Rabbah also remarks, "She sensed that the guest had come." This might indicate that the guest was behind Abraham, relative to Sarah's position. The only other comment on this topic is in Yalkut.³ Here Ishmael

¹In Tanhuma וישב par. 6 we have another long list of womanly shortcomings, including Sarah's eavesdropping. Abraham by contrast used his senses for good. He looked to see the mountain on which to offer Isaac; he looked and found the substitute ram; lifting up his eyes he saw the three visitors, and so on. All of this comparison was started by a reflection on Ecc. 7, 26, "And I found more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets." The fact that Dinah went out on a visit (Gen. 34) starts another list in Tanhuma B וישלח par. 17. Miriam's transgressions are another reason to consider what failings women have. In Deut. Rabbah* Ch. 6, par. 11, we consider Sarah's eavesdropping and her laziness (list started by Miriam text, Deut. 24, 9); later in the same paragraph the creation of Eve is mentioned and Sarah's eavesdropping gets a second notice. Yalkut, Gen. 24 repeats the basic charge of woman as eavesdropper, based on Gen. 2, 22. Isaia 3, 16 is reviewed, with the now expected results, in Yalkut, Isaia 398. Yalkut, Gen. 82 repeats the charge of eavesdropping.

²Ch. 48, par. 16.

³Yalkut, Gen. 82.

is mentioned and also the private meeting. Rashi says that the door was behind the angel. Zohar 103a suggests that one of the parties is the Shekinah--either God was behind the door or Abraham was behind God.

The attribution of the fault of eavesdropping to Sarah would be an example of a moral anti-type. The problems with נחמה אברהם remain unresolved, even for Rashi and Zohar! Most of the commentaries simply pass over the phrase altogether.

13. The Old Age of Abraham and Sarah

The advanced age of both Abraham and his wife heighten the force of the promise. In Genesis Rabbah¹ this verse is compared with another mention of Abraham's age in Gen. 24, 1. Why do we have a second notice about his age in Gen. 24? It is because the Lord restored him to a younger condition at the time of the announcement about Isaac.² Thus years later when he was aged a second time it was necessary to mention this again. In the next paragraph of the same source, we see that in Gen. 18 Abraham was still virile, which was not true by the time spoken of in Gen. 24. Some Rabbis specified that he was virile but impotent.

Other texts are related to the conditions of Abraham and Sarah. The images of Habbakuk 3, 17 apply, "Though the

¹Ch. 48, par. 16.

²This and following citations help explain the Targumic paraphrases of כעת חיה.

fig tree does not blossom, nor fruit be on the vine, the produce of the olive fail, and the fields yield no food." So in Pesikta Rabbati¹ the fig tree is Abraham; he and Sarah are the vines; Sarah is the olive plant and the field.²

In Pesikta Rabbati*³ we find mention of the "fruits of splendid trees" (Lev. 23, 40). The term פְּרִי can also refer to persons, such as Abraham and Sarah. Their old age is their splendour. Often the image is applied to Sarah alone. Thus in Pesikta Rab Kahana we see that God made Sarah splendid in her old age.⁴

Another tree image is to be found in Ezekiel 17, 24, "And all the trees of the field shall know that I the Lord bring low the high tree, and make high the low tree, dry up the green tree, and make the dry tree flourish. I the Lord have spoken, and I will do it." Abraham is the lowly tree which is exalted. The dried up green trees are Abimelech's wives; Sarah is the dry tree which will flourish. The Lord

¹Ch. 42, par. 5.

²Another citation in the same text is that of Ezekiel 36, 36, "The nations shall know that I the Lord have restored the ruins and replanted that which was desolate." Abraham and Sarah were both "ruined" by age and Sarah was the desolate field. So also Aggadath Bereshith Ch. 28. Yalkut, Isaia 438 uses Isaia 53, 2, "he grew . . . like a root out of dry ground" to furnish an image of Sarah being as barren as "dry ground."

³Ch. 51, par. 2.

⁴Ch. 27, par. 9. A very similar development is to be found in Leviticus Rabbah* Ch. 30, par. 10. So also in Yalkut, Lev. 651.

has spoken, as in Gen. 18, 14, and He carries it out, as in Gen. 21, 1. This analogy is found in Genesis Rabbah*¹ and Yalkut.²

A comment on God's question in verse 14, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?", is found in Genesis Rabbah.³ Here a parable is told about a locksmith who is asked to fix a quite ruined lock. He protests that he cannot do it, saying, "Can I create locks from eternity?" By contrast God says

I am able to create them (Abraham and Sarah) from eternity; is it not certainly within My ability to restore them to the days of their youth?

Sarah remarks in verse 12 that she is old and can no longer have sexual pleasure (עדנה). In Rabbinic Hebrew this word can also mean rejuvenation.⁴ So in Baba Mezia 87a Rab Hisda explains that Sarah was made young and beautiful again when she was made fertile. The exact words are

The flesh was rejuvenated (נחעדן הבשר) and the wrinkles were smoothed and beauty came back to where it belonged.

In Genesis Rabbah⁵ the word עדנה is seen as being very

¹Ch. 53, par. 1.

²Yalkut, Ezekiel 357.

³Ch. 48, par. 19. The Soncino text must be quite different here.

⁴Thus the Targumic paraphrases of Sarah's words in verses 11 and 12.

⁵Ch. 48, par. 17.

like עֲדָן "ornaments." These ornaments are like the jewelry of fertile women. In the same way Sarah hopes that her עֲדָנָה will be עֲדָנֶיהָ (periods), like the regular periods of fertile women.

In verse 12 we are told that Sarah laughed to herself (בְּקִרְבָּהּ) when she heard the import of the message. Apparently there was a widely known variant reading בְּקִרְבֵּיהָ, which means "among her relatives."¹ Megillah 9a lists major Greek (LXX) translations for the known Hebrew variants and includes this one.²

It is not clear from any of these references what significance the act of talking to relatives could have had for Jewish readers. It is possible that making light of such a divine promise in public is worse than privately having doubts. After all, Abraham had private doubts (Gen. 17, 17) and did not incur any rebuke such as Sarah does here.

¹The addition of the ו and ה could originally have been a mistaken vocalization.

²So also Pal. Talm. Megillah, Ch. 1, hlch 9; Genesis Rabbah Ch. 48, par. 17; Tanhuma שמות par. 22; Mekilta Ishmael פסחא sect. 14; Yalkut, Gen. 82; and Masseketh Soferim Ch. 1, rule 8. These all mention the list of variants from the accepted Hebrew. The commentaries suggest that the reading "among her relatives" would be found in the LXX. Neither the LXX editions which I consulted (Brooke-McLean and Wevers) nor Field's Origenis Hexapla indicate any such extant manuscripts. See Alan Brooke and Norman McLean, The Old Testament in Greek, 3 vols. (Cambridge University Press, 1906), or John Wevers, Septuaginta: Genesis (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1974). Also F. Field, Origenis Hexaplorum Quae Supersunt sive Veterum Interpretum Graecorum in Totum Vetus Testamentum Fragmenta (Hildesheim: Olms, 1964).

In verse 11 we read that Sarah was no longer fertile. The phrase is somewhat figurative, but would hardly seem open to doubt--"it had ceased to be with Sarah after the way of women (חדל להיות לשרה ארה כנשים).

Nevertheless certain verses from elsewhere in the Bible were brought in by the Rabbis. In Genesis Rabbah¹ it is pointed out that the verb חדל might mean to cease, as in Num. 9, 13, or it might mean to not occur (temporary delay?), as in Deut. 23, 23.

The word ארה becomes the catchword from the phrase. In Leviticus Rabbah*² Psalm 19, 6, "the sun like a strong man runs its course (ארה) with joy" reminds one of the way (ארה) of which Sarah spoke.³ In Yalkut⁴ Joel 4, 15 (English 2, 15) is cited--"the sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining." The commentator remarks that all ways stopped except the way of women, as we read in Gen. 18, 11. Also in Yalkut⁵ the phrase from Psalm 139, 3, "You search out my path (ארחי) and my lying down (ורבעי)" is taken as figurative; the former means woman and the latter noun signifies man.

¹Ch. 48, par. 16.

²Ch. 31, par. 9.

³Yalkut, Psalms 673 repeats this analogy.

⁴Yalkut, Joel 538.

⁵Yalkut, Psalms 887.

Even Job 6, 18, "The caravans turn aside from their courses (ארחות)" triggers the allusion.¹

Admittedly, in this section most of the citations are closed cross-references to other biblical passages. Yet the underlying theme seems to be that God, who has freely given the promise of offspring, will do everything needed to bring this about. The variant בקרוביה evokes comments which might be disapproving of Sarah's thoughts, but we must look further to be sure.

14. In Praise of Peace

In verse 12 Sarah wonders to herself not only about her own physical condition but also about Abraham's (ואדני זקן). In the following verse God recounts her attitude to Abraham, but He depicts Sarah as worrying only about her own condition. Rabbis took this slight change in wording very seriously. For God to report ואדני זקן as ואני זקנתי must have been a very deliberate action on His part. In fact, it was to avoid hurting Abraham's feelings and so to promote peace and marital harmony between these two parents of the faith. In general the theme of promoting peace becomes the stock occasion for listing this intervention by God along with other peace citations.

In Baba Mezia 87a the Lord "changes Sarah's words" and

¹This can be seen in Tanhuma B בראשית par. 33 and Yalkut, Job 900.

so fosters peace. In Yebamoth 65b, in discussing a mishna on the duty to beget children, this modification by the Lord is mentioned as an instrument of peace.¹ In Genesis Rabbah² we are told that the Scriptures "made an incorrect statement" to promote peace. In Tanhuma³ we are told that God spoke "what was not from eternity"; that He "suppressed" her remarks; that Sarah was "talking foolishly" with her relatives about herself and Abraham.⁴ In Tanhuma⁵ we see that God "did not tell Abraham exactly why" Sarah had laughed. Tanhuma B also mentions this peace theme.⁶

¹Pal. Talm. Pea Ch. 1, hlch 1 is similar to the preceding.

²Ch. 48, par. 18.

³שורפטים par. 18.

⁴The variant "with her relatives" is here taken pejoratively.

⁵צ"ל par. 7.

⁶צ"ל par. 10. Pesikta Rabbati* Ch. 50, par. 2 gives a peace list in a discussion on days of atonement. In Sifre, Num. 228 par. 42 another peace list is suggested by the blessing in Num. 6, 26, "The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace." Here it is said that the Holy One "changed the deed" of Sarah. Numbers Rabbah* Ch. 11, par. 7 repeats the remarks on Num. 6, 26. In Kallah Rabbati Ch. 10 the peace theme is again invoked. Note here that the question is whether one can tell a little white lie when congratulating a groom on the beauty of his new bride (when she is not so beautiful). It is allowable since it will help foster their marital union. Perek Hashalom* Ch. 6 and Leviticus Rabbah* Ch. 9, par. 9, have peace lists. So also do Yalkut, Gen. 162, on Jacob's brothers; Yalkut, Num. 711; and Yalkut, Psalms 711, inspired by Psalm 29, 11. Yalkut, Gen. 82 and Rashi record the theme. Zohar 103a holds that Sarah said her husband was old only after she felt herself menstruating. Zohar passes over the peace theme entirely.

These closed cross references practically present God as a "moral type," a promoter of peace and of marital harmony. The various ways of avoiding saying that God told a little white lie do not relieve us of the impression that that is exactly what He did.

15. Reprimand and Reassurance

While it is true that both Abraham and Sarah were old and probably overwhelmed by the events taking place, Sarah more fully acts out her wonderment (or disbelief) in verses 12 to 15.¹

In Genesis Rabbah² one interpretation is that the Lord says to Sarah and her relatives³

You think yourselves to be of the younger set and that your companions are the older ones? And am I too old to perform miracles?

The Lord is here chiding Sarah for questioning only Abraham's condition, and He is also playing on her closing words in v. 13 (as if they applied to Himself).

The response to Sarah in verse 15, "No, but you did laugh" was considered by many Rabbis as part of the whole spectrum of Divine messages to women in the Bible. This was apparently the only case of direct conversation between God

¹The only noteworthy Targum modification of the MT is in v. 15 of Ps.-Jonathan where an angel speaks and says "do not be afraid."

²Ch. 48, par. 17.

³Using the variant reading.

and a woman. Other examples, such as might involve Hagar or Rebecca, were thought to be done by angels or other intermediaries.¹

In Genèsis Rabbah² we read that the Holy One never condescended to converse with a woman except with the righteous Sarah, and even that dialogue was roundabout and limited to the very brief: "No, but you did laugh."³

In Ozar Midrashim (p. 223) the commentator takes a rather harsh view of Sarah's doubting. He feels that Sarah "feigned compliance" and by this lessened the greatness of woman in matters of counsel and harmony. God had told Abraham that he would have a son by Sarah, but the son would not be born if she did not have faith.⁴

The fact that the angel of verse 14 promised to return is seen as significant in Yalkut.⁵ In contrast, Elisha, in 2 Kings 4, 16, had made a similar promise of a child for the Shunamite woman without mentioning that he himself would be

¹Thus Pal. Talm. סנהדרין Ch. 7, par. 1 and Genesis Rabbah Ch. 20, par. 6.

²Ch. 48, par. 20.

³So also in Genesis Rabbah Ch. 45, par. 10 and Ch. 63, par. 7; and Psalms Rabbah Ch. 9, par. 7. Yalkut, Gen. 80 and 82 record the same.

⁴All of these remarks were made in the context of applying Deut. 32, 10-12 to Abraham. See J. D. Eisenstein, Ozar Midrashim: A Library of Two Hundred Minor Midrashim (New York, 1915).

⁵Yalkut, 2 Kings 228.

there. Presumably Elisha did so because he knew he was old and liable to die before the birth of the child.

Rashi says that the angel who spoke in verse 10 was an agent of God and so did not speak in his own name. Rashi then notes Genesis 17, 21, wherein God Himself promises to return when Isaac is born. The intent of Rashi's remarks may be to establish God as speaker of verses 14 and 15, but I cannot say for sure. Rashi also mentions the matter of 2 Kings 4, 16.¹ Zohar, 102b and 115a, says that God spoke the promise and not an angel.

These traditions include some unfavorable interpretations of Sarah's doubting. Most, however, are citations of the closed cross-reference type.

16. The Departure

Having delivered their message and having shared in Abraham's hospitality, the angels had to get on with their tasks. Abraham escorts them as they go.

In Genesis Rabbah² it is pointed out that such escorting is an integral part of hospitality to visitors. This is done by reminding the reader of an old adage, "I have had food and drink; escort me."

¹Rashi also mentions the different uses which the word כי can have. In Gen. 18, 15, the כי of ויראה כי means because and the כי of כי צחקת means but. These observations are repeated in Rashi's remarks on Rosh Hashanna 3a.

²Ch. 48, par. 20.

In Exodus Rabbah*¹ Abraham's escorting of the angels is contrasted to Pharaoh's letting go of the Chosen People. This latter was an act of expulsion and not escorting.²

Usually Abraham's act of escorting the angels is considered part of the group of meritorious actions, which we looked at in section 7 of this chapter. An additional citation of just the escorting parallels alone is in Tanhuma בשלח sect. 4. Abraham accompanied the angels; God accompanied his children in the desert for forty years.³

Rashi notes that the Hiphil forms of שקף (we have וישקפו in v. 16) always have a menacing connotation, except in Deut. 26, 15, which concerns God's mercy to the poor.

Maimonides,⁴ in a list of social obligations, observes that escorting strangers is a very great virtue. Abraham instituted it by giving wayfarers food and drink and escorting them. Hospitality to wayfarers is greater than receiving the

¹Ch. 20, par. 3.

²This same contrast is spoken of in Yalkut, Exodus 226. Here the opening line of Mekilta Ishmael בשלח is quoted, "the term 'letting go' has no other meaning than 'escorting.'"

³This paragraph ends with the following remark, Abraham says, "Let a little water be brought . . ." as it is written in the section And the Lord appeared to him.

This could be a reminder to the reader of the usual start to the list of meritorious actions of Abraham, or the sense of the remark might have been simply that the angels had enjoyed their rest and had done their assignment and so it was time to go on.

⁴Mishne Torah Sefer Shofetim אהל ח' Ch. 14, par. 2.

Shekinah, and escorting guests is greater than any other form of hospitality, as it says in Sotah 46b, "Whoever does not escort guests is a shedder of blood." This last quote from the Babylonian Talmud is a correct quotation but hardly for the context in which Maimonides uses it; in the Talmud the context was criminal actions.

Except for Rashi's semantic note, the thrust of these remarks is that escorting guests is an integral part of the virtue and practice of hospitality.

Conclusions to Chapter I

It is clear that most of the variations and additions found in the principal versions and Targums were maintained and developed in the later Jewish writings.

For example, while we find new remarks about the Amorite Mamre lending his name to the place of the visit there is usually no correlation made between the tree or trees of verse 1 and the tree of verses 4 and 8. The Targum references to Abraham's recent circumcision represent a small portion of the range of devices which connect the divine visit to Abraham with his obedience to this ritual.

The three visitors are angels who have the appearance of men. While some attention is paid in later commentaries to Abraham's bow of verse 2, many other comments are made to assure us that Abraham does not regard these visitors as divine beings. The concept of the Shekinah is often used to explain

Jahweh's mode of appearance to Abraham. While there are differences in how to read the singular יְהוָה of verse 3, the Samaritan plural reading is not sustained. 4

Most of the later sources depict Abraham as the host who has the supplies provided for the washing of the guests' feet. Besides being a hospitable act, it also takes on dimensions of religious purification. Abraham's offer of a meal is central to his hospitality but we do not find many explicit expansions on the Targumic suggestion that Abraham remarked to his guests that it was exactly meal time, nor on Ps.-Jonathan's reference to their saying grace. Some traditions do assume that it was a very hot midday when the guests arrived.

The tradition that the breads were unleavened was easily maintained since the visit became very firmly associated with the Passover season. Many even speak of nine seahs of dough, a prodigious quantity. The "spiritualizing" of the eating of the meal became a strong though not unchallenged tradition.

Only Tanhuma B שרה par. 3 has a single speaker (God) in verse 9; therefore the LXX variation did not receive much support. The sources vary as to whether God or one of the angels spoke in verse 10.

The Targumic understanding that Abraham and Sarah would be physically rejuvenated is quite well developed later on. An interval of one year brings us to the birth of Isaac

in the next Passover season. The matter of having Ishmael present with Sarah does not die out, but neither does it receive much elaboration. Ishmael is often taken to be the helper in verse 7. As indicated in the Targums, Sarah's laughter was sometimes taken as wonder or disbelief.

The Lord spoke to Abraham in verse 13. His role as peacemaker was not delegated to an angel. Traditions vary as to whether God or an angel spoke in verse 14. The Targumic remarks that nothing can be hidden from the Lord receive no special development. The feast mentioned by Ps.-Jonathan is surely Passover. Most of our sources take God to be the speaker in verse 15b.

It should also be pointed out that later Jewish sources do not always slavishly imitate tendencies found in the ancient versions and Targums. To take one example here, let us review the question of the precise identities of the speakers. The later sources understood Genesis 18, 1-16 as a genuine theophany (groupings 1, 2A, 2B, 2C, 3 and 6) during which angels in human form (groupings 2B, 4A, 4B, 7 and 16) also appear. Many of these sources (groupings 4A and 7) agree with the versions and Targums in seeing God as the one addressed in verse 3. However in groupings 4A and 4B we also find a new interpretation--that the addressee was the leading angel. This interpretation, going back at least to the Babylonian Talmud, persists up through Maimonides.

In verses 10 and 14 the MT and most versions and

Targums do not clearly identify the speaker as God. Ps.-Jonathan explicitly understands him to be an angel in verse 10, and a similar implicit understanding can be derived from other remarks in the Neofiti and Fragmentary Targums. In the later sources we find both interpretations--that the speaker was an angel (groupings 4B, 11, 12 and 15) or that the speaker was God (groupings 11 and 12). There are no changes from the MT and Targum understanding that God spoke directly to Abraham in verse 13. In fact the assertion that God modified Sarah's words to promote harmony (grouping 14) demands that He be the speaker here.

On the other hand, Ps.-Jonathan, and possibly Neofiti and Fragmentary by implication, identify the speaker of the reprimand in verse 15 as an angel. All the later sources¹ (grouping 15) assume that God issues the reprimand. So we have one Targumic interpretation not being maintained in later Jewish commentary.

We should also evaluate the later Jewish materials in light of Daniel Patte's hermeneutical norms mentioned at the start of this chapter. His first was that a biblical verse can be interpreted by other biblical passages. There is no doubt that other passages of Scripture were used in connection with the Mamre story!

One of the results of this use of other Scriptures is

¹Rashi may possibly be an exception.

that it helps us to be aware of the context of the story. We are often reminded that God had previously promised offspring to Abraham, Gen. 15, 5; that Abraham himself was recently circumcised, Gen. 17; that God continued to speak to Abraham, Gen. 18, 22; that Lot was rescued before Sodom was destroyed, Gen. 19; and that Abraham later moved and had trouble with Abimelech before Isaac was born, Gen. 20 and 21.

Another result of the frequent citation of other Scriptures is that the lessons of the Mamre story are carried to other sections of the Bible. The many parallel instances cited in the merit groupings are in some way enriched by their correlation to the Mamre account. In the same way other texts such as Lev. 9, 6; Ezekiel 17, 24 and 36, 36; Habakkuk 3, 17; Psalm 25, 10; and Isaia 33, 8 and 15-17 and 66, 2-3 are concretized when one thinks of Abraham and Sarah and God's dealings with them. This enrichment or concretization (my terms) is disturbing to us today because in our own exegetical research we are primarily concerned with the Sitz im Leben of each text. I think, however, that we must allow for the fact that many Scriptural themes may have consciously or unconsciously been helpful to biblical authors. For example, the citation of Psalm 25, 10 may seem to be a mere proof text when applied to God's visiting Abraham as he was recuperating, but certainly verses 10-14 of that Psalm may have been unconsciously inspired by traditions about Abraham present in the Psalmist's own spiritual life.

In addition to citations which help us keep perspective on the larger contexts of God's dealings with Abraham and Sarah, and to certain evocative biblical passages such as in the paragraph immediately preceding, we also find many verbal details of the story which are cross-referenced with an intensity which we can hardly imagine prior to seeing specific examples of it. Thus considerations of the exact time of the day when the theophany occurred, of the saying about refreshing hearts, of Abraham as servant and as one who raises his eyes and sees good things, of parallel texts involving the word calf or a synonym, of the matter of the puncta extraordinaria, and the like, certainly lend force to the hermeneutical axiom that everything is meaningful in Scripture.

The phenomenon of telescoping is much exemplified in our passage. Principally we are led to set the whole event in the Passover season and to consider the close relationships which the story has to the account of circumcision in the previous chapter of Genesis. Other people (such as Og and Ishmael), places (such as the cave of Machphelah), and customs (such as the law about not eating meat and milk together) are telescoped to our study but only in minor ways.

Abraham is very much presented in these Rabbinic traditions as a moral example for us to imitate. He is greatly praised for his hospitality, his eagerness to receive guests, his generous table of bread, meat, and dairy foods. The whole series of merit parallels are predicated on his actions as

host. His escorting is also an integral part of this virtue. Many of the folk sayings are also related to hospitality.¹

There is a certain amount of emphasis on Abraham's concern for ritual purity, although this is certainly minor in relation to the moral example he affords with regard to hospitality.

Sarah receives some praise for her helpfulness, her caution, and her modesty. The commentators are sometimes uneasy with her for her slower and perhaps doubting responses to the message about Isaac. Eavesdropping seems to be more of a stock vice.

Lot seems to serve merely as a foil, being either fearful about hospitality or uninterested in the finer points of hospitality and religious purity.

Patte's second norm was that Scripture is meant to be actualized. He found that such actualizations often dealt with current cultural changes rather than with salient events.

Our passage bears this out. Besides the virtues of Abraham and Sarah (hospitality, religious purity, modesty, and so on), we find very few other actualizations in our research. Circumcision receives some mention, and also the fact that we should sit during Synagogue services and School. We also see

¹E.g., that we should not be reluctant towards the wishes of a great person; that a woman can size up travellers better than a man; that we should do more than we promise to do; that a small act is important, if it is a righteous one; and "I have had food and drink, escort me."

that we may exaggerate a bit to a groom about the beauty of his new bride in order to confirm him in his confident love. Certainly these virtues and practices are important, but they are part of everyday life and their observation need not challenge us to the core of our beings.

Another set of guidelines which can be helpful in our analysis of the Jewish material are the hermeneutical modes and rules of James Sanders, which were mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation. We will first look for instances wherein the human faults and weaknesses of the biblical figures are mentioned. Sanders called this a theologizing hermeneutic. There is very little of this sort of commentary in the Jewish material on Genesis 18.

With regard to Abraham, about the only hint of failing stems from the notion that Mamre had to argue with him in order to convince him to accept circumcision. Abraham's bow to the visitors was carefully explained as one of greeting rather than adoration: this simultaneously enhanced Abraham's hospitality and removed any possible doubt about his understanding of the identity of the visitors.

Sarah was not quite the plaster saint that Abraham was. She may have laughed with her relatives about the possibility of her and Abraham having a child. Her remarks about Abraham's age and condition had to be covered over by God Himself. The Ozar Midrashim commentator even wondered how sincerely Sarah accepted the reprimand of verse 15.

On the other hand, to note that Sarah was an eavesdropper or a lazy wife was a much lesser charge. The observation that the Lord spoke to her briefly but without intermediary represented Rabbinic thought about the status of women in general much more than it represented criticism or praise of Sarah. Thus there was more comment about Sarah's shortcomings as compared to Abraham's, but the total amount of criticism was still not large.

In addition to these few references to Abraham and Sarah we do have some other considerations about God's love for sinful mankind. In grouping 8 we have three references to traditions about God fending off angelic objections to the giving of the Torah to men. The fuller contexts of the angelic objections (not shown in this dissertation) indicate that, before He gave them the Torah, God knew well that men are often weak and sinful. By implication, in the merit parallels based on Abraham's hospitality we may reflect on the lack of faith and perseverance of many who followed Moses out of Egypt, or who settled in the land, or who would be of the generations from then until the final day in the Messianic future. Yet for all these, just and unjust alike, God showered down His many blessings.

The rest of the traditions "moralize," to use Sanders' term. They draw lessons, mainly on the virtue of hospitality and the faith which we should have in the word and power of God. Other foci included the observance of circumcision,

Passover, ritual purity, visiting the sick, honoring the elderly, and so on.

Granted that the few actualizations based on this passage seem to be mainly cultural ones and that the majority of the Jewish writers drew moral lessons from it, we may reasonably suppose that most of the ancient Jewish commentary on Genesis 18, 1-16 was supportative or constitutive. Such emphasis on God's love for men and on His special care for the ancestors of the chosen people would, of course, always be a challenge to the hearers in one sense, but does not stand as a demonstrably challenging or "prophetic" mode of hermeneutic as Sanders uses the term.

CHAPTER II
EARLY CHRISTIAN AND ALEXANDRIAN JEWISH
HERMENEUTIC OF GEN. 18, 1-16

Introduction

Before we gather together the comments of early Christian writers, we should try to see how they generally understood and used the Old Testament. Within such an overall perspective we may then be more prepared to evaluate their use of the Mamre and Jabbok stories.

Since much of Patristic biblical study involved typology and allegory, we should define these terms at the outset. R. P. C. Hanson¹ defines typology as "the interpreting of an event belonging to the present or recent past as the fulfillment of a similar situation recorded or prophesied in Scripture." Many New Testament writers saw Old Testament persons, events, and situations as types of Christ or of events in his life on earth. To express the fact that both the Old Testa-

¹Allegory and Event (London: S.C.M. Press, 1959), p. 7. I consider Hanson's work on Origen and his review of ancient Jewish, Christian, and pagan approaches to literature to be very clear and stimulating. He is careful to supply many biblical examples of each process which he defines. Patristic scholars may prefer other working definitions or classifications, but I will rely on Hanson here.

ment situation and the fulfillment in Jesus were believed to be literally true by these writers, we usually call these New Testament assertions "historical" types.

The problem with using typology is obviously one of determining what makes two situations similar. Patristic similarities which appear to be overly subjective today are sometimes called "sermon illustration" types or "incidental" types by scholars.

In contrast to typology there is allegory. Hanson¹ defines allegory as "the interpretation of an object or person or a number of objects or persons as in reality meaning some object or person of a later time, with no attempt made to trace a relationship of 'similar situation' between them." There is a rather small amount of allegory in the New Testament itself. K. J. Woollcombe points out that Philo and other ancient exegetes frequently used the language of typology to describe their own allegorizing. He allows such interpretation to be called "symbolic typology."² To avoid confusion I will avoid using this last term.

G. W. H. Lampe, in an article which sought to establish the proper bases for a moderate use of biblical typology

¹ Ibid.

² "The Biblical Origins and Patristic Development of Typology," Essays in Biblical Typology (London: Allenson, 1957), p. 65.

in our own time,¹ says that the Jew looked back to the mighty acts of God in ancient history to find the reality which gave coherence and unity to all subsequent development. The Christian, in some measure, reversed this position. The great acts of God in Israelite history acquired significance because of their character as foretastes of what was later accomplished in Christ.²

This Christian reversal must be explained. Lampe points out that typological and allegorical methods of interpreting the Scriptures were very common until this century. In fact for many Christians Old Testament events "were not fundamentally important for their value as literary history, but as types and images in and through which the Holy Spirit had indicated what was to come when God would bring in the New Covenant to fulfill and supercede the Old."³

Such a way of reading Old Testament events had even been the preconception of the New Testament writers themselves. Lampe observes that

A common belief linked the authors of the New Testament books with their readers. This was the

¹James Smart, in the fourth chapter of his book The Interpretation of Scripture (Westminster, 1961), pp. 93-133, presents an extensive rebuke to proponents of biblical typology for our times. Since the purpose of my own study here is to analyze Christian sources within a definite period of history, I simply refer the reader to Smart's work.

²"The Reasonableness of Typology," p. 28, in Essays in Biblical Typology.

³Page 10.

conviction which they shared; that the whole Bible spoke directly of Christ, in prophecy, type, and allegory so far as the Old Testament is concerned, and the consequent belief that the historical context of a passage and the immediate intention which the original author had in writing it in the circumstances of his own time were of relatively minor importance.¹

In the beginning these prophecies, types, and allegories were often used in apologetical and polemical situations. Lampe points out, however, that the use of such interpretations "had to be carried out at least as much for the Church's own sake as for the purposes of missionary propaganda. It was necessary for the Christian understanding of the Gospel, and all the indications show that it was a process initiated by Christ himself."²

¹Page 14.

²Pages 24-25.

Yves Congar deals directly with the New Testament roots of typology and its importance for the early Church in his Tradition and Traditions, translated by Michael Naseby and Thomas Rainborough (Macmillan, 1967), pp. 64-83. First he examines New Testament uses of Old Testament witnesses. For the New Testament writers, the Old Testament reveals the economy of the covenant as fulfilled in Christ. Christ included "in his death and exaltation all the (new) People of God, to such an extent that his destiny embraced their existence and destiny. The meaning of Scripture is then relative to Christ and to the Church . . ." (p. 68).

In addition to finding strict types in the Old Testament, the New Testament writers make many allusions to details in the Old Testament which they see as realized in some action of Christ's or of his followers. In fact reference is often made to a zone of texts which exemplify, perhaps by analogy, constant factors in God's plan.

Mutatis mutandis, the Fathers treat both Testaments in the same manner as the New Testament writers treated the Old. Their main intention was to discover Christological types. They also develop other type patterns.

Congar is particularly interested in two characteris-

Lampe goes on to define a legitimate "historical" typology, wherein there is a real correspondence in history, sense, and context between the type in the past and the fulfillment in the future. He opposes this to the typology which seeks to establish "not so much a relation between the past and the future, the foreshadowing and the fulfillment, as between the earthly and the heavenly, the shadow and the reality."¹ As an example of this latter kind of typology Lampe mentions the scarlet cord of Rahab at Jericho, which was taken by many Fathers to typify the saving blood of Christ.

Lampe also holds that allegory as such is even less valid a procedure for our times than the second class of typology (which he calls "sermon illustration" typology).² He

tics of Patristic exegesis. First is the fact that frequently the Fathers refer to Scriptural events as models for things still being realized in the present. The Fathers "do not base what they have to say on Scripture after the manner of Schriftbeweis; if they quote it, and they do indeed quote it, it is rather as an illustration of what they are affirming than as a textual argument. Their real foundation is the reality of the Church, that is to say, the Church's tradition as a living transmission of lived realities" (p. 79).

The second characteristic is a frequent ecclesial reference to Scripture as the record of the wishes and plan of God. "The Fathers are convinced that all Scripture refers not only to Christ, but also the Church, and that it contains, under the form of a type, all that is useful to its historical life" (p. 80). As examples of such ecclesial references, Congar mentions the many types concentrating on Christian priesthood and hierarchy, and on sacraments such as penance and confirmation.

¹Page 33.

²Page 35.

notes that the Fathers developed "sermon illustration" typology and allegory to an almost unlimited extent.

In the companion article to Lampe's, K. J. Woollcombe studies in detail the origins of Patristic hermeneutics. He distinguishes typology from allegory and also from the fulfillment of prophecy.

He then gives a brief history of Jewish and Christian analyses of Old Testament prophecies, and a history of pagan, Jewish, and Christian uses of positive (non-apologetic) allegory. In comparing St. Paul's allegorical exegesis of Hagar and Sarah (Galatians 4) with Philo's, Woollcombe sees much greater merit in Paul's approach.

In the Pauline interpretation, the historical pattern of the story of Sarah and Hagar is used as a parable of the historical pattern of God's dealings with the Old and the New Israel. In the Philonic interpretation, however, the historical pattern of the story plays no part at all.¹

He sees Paul's approach as closer to such Palestinian Rabbinic allegorizing as we have. Woollcombe notes that the majority of Christian Fathers preferred Philo's allegorical method to that of Paul. He discusses the differences which eventually developed between the Alexandrian and Antiochean "schools" of exegesis, as followers of Philo and Paul respectively, and notes that the Alexandrian allegorical approach was more widespread and enduring.

Woollcombe postulates that the primary reason for the

¹Page 53.

rapid rise of Christian allegory after the example of Philo must have been Gnostic influence and anti-Gnostic polemics. Thus the Dailogue with Trypho of Justin Martyr, which is historical in its outlook, did not inaugurate a long period of such literature. Instead allegory and historical typology and "sermon illustration" typology were gradually fused together in a complex fashion.

Another scholar who has argued for the contemporary use of historical biblical typology is Jean Daniélou. In From Shadows to Reality Daniélou examined Christian typological exegesis of certain Hexateuchal themes from the second to the fourth centuries. For each theme he displayed the thematic instances in both Testaments, in Palestinian and Alexandrian Judaism, and in the Patristic writings. Daniélou sought for links between New Testament typological exegesis and the great doctors of the fourth century, in order to see whether there was a continuity between the two and on what lines it was worked out.

He agrees that the dissensions which Christians had with Jews and Gnostics were influential in Christian development of typology. Typology helped to show the unity of the two Testaments to the Gnostics,¹ and the superiority of the New Testament to the Jews.² In addition to polemical works,

¹So Woollcombe on pp. 69-70 of his article.

²So Lampe on p. 23 of his article.

Daniélou reminds us that other sources for our study of Patristic typology include sacramental catacheses, iconography, homilies, treatises on spirituality, and biblical commentaries. In this survey of sources we see again the value of Lampe's observation that such interpretations were necessary for Christians themselves.

In the course of presenting the history of different themes, Daniélou devoted a chapter to Rahab as a type of the Church. He notes the oldest Jewish traditions,¹ one of which sets Rahab as "the type of the pagans who are incorporated into the ecclesia, the people of God."² He then examines several Patristic works. In these Rahab is initially a type of sinful humanity whom Jesus came to save; in later works Rahab becomes a type of the Church itself.

Throughout these Christian writings about Rahab the scarlet cord is taken as a type of Christ's blood. Daniélou admits that the redness of the cord is only of incidental resemblance to the blood of Christ, as far as we are concerned, but the Fathers assumed that nothing in Scripture can be fortuitous. He is willing to accept such incidental types if the thrust of the Patristic typological considerations remains

¹To be found in Strack-Billerbeck I, 21-22.

²From Shadows to Reality, translated by W. Hibberd (London: Burns and Oates, 1960), p. 244.

centered on the theological content of the biblical theme in question.¹

In a chapter on the typology of the sacrifice of Isaac, Daniélou notes several patterns of interpretation of the three patriarchs.² In Palestinian Judaism the three were models of observance of the Law and traditions; of the three Abraham was the preeminent figure. For Philo the three represent stages of mystical ascent. Abraham stands for virtue which comes from study; Jacob represents virtue acquired by moral effort; at the top of the ascent Isaac is perfect virtue, which is a gift from God. Christians continued to see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as models and to some extent they also saw them as types of Christ. Abraham was usually seen as a model of faith and of withdrawal from the world. He is rarely considered as a type. The Mamre incident "has a theological rather than a typological significance."³ Jacob was more often held up as a type--based on the meanings of his two names, his servitude to Laban, his ladder dream, or his struggle with Esau in the womb. However it was Isaac who became

¹From Shadows to Reality, pp. 246-247. The French original of Daniélou's book, entitled Sacramentum Futuri, was published in 1950. Lampe's remarks, originally delivered as a lecture in 1955, were published in 1957. Presumably, therefore, Lampe's dismissal of the sermon illustration type of the scarlet cord is in response to Daniélou's tolerance of it.

²Pages 115-118.

³Page 117. No further explanation is given by Daniélou at this point.

the principal patriarchal type for the Christian (as he had for Philo). The main events of his life were seen to be his birth and sacrifice.

The insights of these Patristics scholars can help us to comprehend and to order the many individual selections from the Fathers which we will now examine. Let us fix our understanding of these insights in the form of eight general principles or guidelines, and test each guideline again at the end of this chapter.

1. For Christian writers Old Testament events acquire significance in relation to, or as foretastes of, Christ's later accomplishments.
2. The immediate literary context of an Old Testament passage need not be as important to the Fathers as typology based on the passage.
3. Types and allegories based on the Old Testament were considered vital for understanding the life of Christ and the life of the Church. Some of these types and allegories have recognizable anti-Jewish or anti-Gnostic bases.
4. In addition to "historical" types in which there is acceptable correspondence between an Old Testament event and one in the New, we find much "sermon illustration" typology and spiritual allegory. All of these types of interpretation are frequently mixed together. Some of the sermon illustration typology

and allegory is congruent with the theological content of the passage under study.

5. Philo's allegorical endeavors are much imitated by Christian writers.
6. There are interpretational differences of some import between the Alexandrian and Antiochean "schools."
7. Abraham himself is not often considered as a type of Christ; some events in the life of Jacob bring about such typological interpretations.
8. Biblical passages serve as proofs in discussions of other doctrines or aspects of theology as well as of those directly involving Christ.

Format for Presentation of Christian
Hermeneutic of Gen. 18

The nature of the Christian materials is so different from that of the Rabbinic materials of Chapter I that we cannot expect to likewise place the Christian findings into thematic groupings.

There is a greater amount of Christian material, and it is much more easily datable and attributable to specific authors. Further, there are at least two schools of interpretation, the Alexandrian and the Antiochean, which should be looked at in their entirety since they differ on the use of allegory and typology. Western Fathers tended to be imitative of the Eastern schools; we shall present them as a group also.

Therefore instead of thematic groupings I have placed

the Christian writers as individuals into six chronological groups--a) Early Apologists; b) the Alexandrian school; c) later Eastern writers; d) the Antiochean school; e) Western writers through Augustine; and f) later Western writers. Group a represents the earliest writers of all (except Philo); groups b and d follow in proper time order; and group e more or less covers the time period of d. Group c is partly out of time sequence but I didn't want to make too many subdivisions, and the writers by and large imitate the findings of groups a and b. Group f follows e chronologically and brings us to Bede in the eighth century.

For the reader who would prefer to choose from among these many writers, I would recommend Philo, Origen and Chrysostom in the East, and Gregory of Elvira, Ambrose, Augustine, and Bede in the West--with Origen and Chrysostom being the most important two of all.

A. Early Greek and Latin Apologists

Before turning to the writings of Justin Martyr, it is necessary to point out that there are apparently no references to the Mamre or Jabbok stories in Jewish and Christian Intertestamental literature. Jean Daniélou, in his study of the writings of Jewish Christians,¹ examined the theological concepts unique to this very early phase of Christian history.

¹The Theology of Jewish Christianity, translated by John Baker (Chicago: Regnery, 1964), esp. pp. 117-146.

He points out that Christ was often referred to as the glorious angel, or the venerable angel, in these texts. We should take the expression angel in a neutral Semitic sense here--as a supernatural being which manifests itself. He notes that

The nature of this supernatural being is not determined by the expression but by the context. The word represents the Semitic form of the designation of the Word and the Spirit as spiritual substances, as "persons," though the latter terminology was not to be introduced into theology until a good deal later. "Angel" is its old-fashioned equivalent.¹

Daniélou then goes on to show² that the image of Michael, the chief angel in Jewish thought, was at times transformed into the image of Jesus in Jewish Christian literature. He also makes a case³ for a similar process occurring between Gabriel and the Holy Spirit.

I have personally consulted all the textual citations Daniélou presents for the above relationships based on Michael and Gabriel and have found his presentation to be a reasonable one. One would have to determine the validity of Daniélou's evaluation of each of the ancient texts he uses as being of genuine Jewish Christian origin. Such a determination is beyond my own competence.

The reason for mentioning Daniélou's study should be

¹Page 118.

²Pages 121-127.

³Pages 127-131.

clear. Michael and Gabriel were often identified in Jewish sources as being involved at Mamre. The Christian interpretations which we will now examine usually assume that the three visitors were the pre-Incarnate Christ and two angels, or that they represent the Trinity in some way. Such interpretations may well have originated in Jewish Christian circles prior to the time of Justin.

1. Justin Martyr¹

In his Dialogue with Trypho Justin makes some use of the Mamre incident as evidence for the divinity of Jesus. The Dialogue is believed to have been written down between 160-165 A.D., but the discussions between Justin and Trypho may have actually occurred many years earlier in Ephesus.² While we are dependent on Justin to provide an accurate account of Trypho's opinions and contributions, scholars are generally satisfied that Trypho has been depicted fairly.³

¹J. Quasten deals with the life, writings, and theology of Justin on pp. 196-219 of vol. 1 of his Patrology, 3 vol. (Newman, 1950-1955). L. W. Barnard studies the persona and theologies of Justin and Trypho in his article "The Old Testament and Judaism in the Writings of Justin Martyr," Vetus Testamentum 14 (1964) pp. 395-406. Willis A. Shotwell examines Justin's relationship to other Christian, Jewish, and Greek influences, and also his exegetical principles, in The Biblical Exegesis of Justin Martyr, London, 1965. R. P. C. Hanson studies Justin's use of allegory on pp. 103-108 of his Allegory and Event. I used vols. 8 and 11 of Textes et Documents, H. Hemmer and P. Lejay, eds., Paris, 1909, for G. Archambault's Greek edition of the Dialogue.

²Quasten, I, 202-203; Barnard, 395.

³Quasten, *ibid.*; Barnard, 396; Quasten, p. 202, identifies Trypho as a Rabbi Tarpon who is mentioned in the

There are some philosophical presuppositions which Justin makes which we should mention before going to specific passages. Quasten notes¹ that "Justin denies the substantial omnipresence of God. God the Father dwells, according to him, in the regions above the sky. He cannot leave his place, and therefore he is unable to appear in the world."² Justin postulates that Jesus is the mediator from the Father; that Jesus is the subject of any theophany which men may receive.

The Jesus of Justin, however, may be subordinate to the Father.³ Justin uses the well known concept of the Logos in regard to Jesus as mediator, but not in our selections for this paper.⁴

Let us now look at the instances where Justin uses the Mamre story. The principal line of argument occurs in chs. 55 to 57. Perhaps the best way to present the material is in the form of summaries. In the left margin we will note

Mishna, but Barnard, p. 396, argues against this, assuming Trypho to be an educated layman.

¹I, 208.

²Quasten offers excerpts from chapters 60, 2 and 127 of the Dialogue to prove his point.

³Quasten, I, 209. Benedict Kominiak, in The Theophanies of the Old Testament in the Writings of St. Justin (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1948), pp. 27-47, argues that Justin is not a thoroughgoing subordinationist.

⁴Shotwell, pp. 103-115, presents a detailed comparison of the very different uses which Justin and Philo make of the Logos concept. Quasten, I, 207-211, restricts himself to a brief overview of Justin's use of the concept.

the chapter, paragraph, and speaker (Trypho had some Jewish companions with him, and some of them assist in the dialogue at times).

- 55, 1
Trypho Let us return to the topic; show us if Scripture speaks of another God, beside the maker of the world.
- 56, 1
Justin He who appeared to Abraham was God, accompanied by two angels; these three were sent by another . . . whom we call Creator of the world and Father.
- 56, 3
Trypho & comp. How does the Mamre incident prove that the Holy Spirit has ever spoken of any other God or Lord?
- 56, 4
Justin Scripture does speak of another Lord or God, under (^ὁὁ)¹ the Creator of the world, who is also called an angel.
- 56, 5
Justin Was God one of the three who appeared as men to Abraham?
- Trypho No. God appeared to him before the appearance of the three men. The three men were angels, one of whom was to announce the news to Sarah, and the other two were to destroy Sodom.²
- 56, 6
Justin Note that the one who promised the birth later returned, and the prophetic word calls him God.³

¹The use of this word reflects Justin's subordinationist Christology.

²Barnard, 404, notes Justin's knowledge of this post-biblical Jewish exegesis. Shotwell, 74, reminds us that this explanation can be found in Genesis Rabbah and in Josephus. We found it in groupings 4a and 4b of Ch. I of this paper, as well as in some Targums.

³Justin here cites Gen. 21, 12 as proof. Shotwell, 36-37, notes the technique of inferential analogy used here and in the latter half of Ch. 56. Kominiak, p. 32, points out that this citation is somewhat inappropriate as an arguing point.

- 56, 9
Trypho Well then, we were incorrect in assuming that the three who visited Abraham were all angels; but you have not yet proven that there is another God.
- 56, 11
Justin I shall try to prove that He who appeared to Abraham and is called God is different from God the Creator, different in number but not in γνόμεν.
- 56, 12
Justin Note Gen. 19, 24, "The Lord poured brimstone from the Lord out of heaven."
- 56, 13
4th. comp. We must therefore admit that one of these two angels who went to Sodom is called Lord, in addition to God who appeared to Abraham.
- 56, 22
Justin No. The one called Lord is not one of the two angels who went to Sodom. He is spoken of in Gen. 18, 22; when the two went to Sodom, He stayed behind to talk with Abraham. Then He went to talk with Lot and He destroyed the city, not the two angels.¹
- 57, 1
Trypho If your arguments are correct so far, we are still dubious at the statement that He ate the food which Abraham gave Him.²
- 57, 2
Justin Either only the two angels ate non-human type food, or all three ate but in the mode we would speak of if we were to say that fire consumes all things. We should not understand by this that they ate with teeth and working jaws. There is no difficulty in the interpretation of this verse for those experienced in τροπολογίας.³

¹Justin again cites Gen. 19, 24.

²Trypho does not seem to know of Jewish traditions about the spiritualizing of the eating. Hanson, 104, points out that the pre-Incarnate Christ would not have eaten. Barnard, 404, points out that at least Justin is acquainted with this post-biblical Jewish exegesis.

³Trypho allows this explanation to stand. Shotwell, p. 19, points out that this spiritualizing allows the text to be a clear prediction of Christ. R. M. Grant, in The Letter and the Spirit (New York: Macmillan, 1957), p. 137, wants to

In Ch. 126, 4-5, Justin briefly reviews the Mamre story, stressing that it was a genuine theophany. In Ch. 86, 5, Justin collects many symbols from the O.T. which prefigured either the cross or some other aspect of the life of Jesus. Even the oak of Mamre is a cross symbol; God appeared to Abraham from (ἀπὸ) the tree. The use of ἀπὸ here is surely a bit of calculated imprecision on Justin's part.¹

If we accept Trypho as an educated Jewish contemporary of Justin's, and not simply as a literary foil, we must admit that he goes along with Justin and his Platonic philosophical concepts and Christian exegesis on a fair number of occasions. Barnard describes Trypho this way,

Trypho was a Hellenistic Jewish layman who combined the culture and enquiring spirit of the hellenistic world with a knowledge of traditional Jewish exegesis and haggadah. He has no knowledge of the Hebrew language but knows accurately the Septuagint version of the Old Testament. His is not however the Judaism of Philo and Alexandrian hellenistic Judaism, nor that of the Palestinian Rabbinic schools. Trypho represents a mediating Judaism, perhaps having Palestinian roots, which cannot be strictly classified. Judaism, even after 70 A.D., was not a monolithic structure and had a number of facets, as recent discoveries have shown. Trypho represents one of these

translate τροπολογίας as "analogy" or "comparison," but does not explain why. Shotwell, 13, explains that the "analogy" is the analogy of fire consuming something.

I would see Justin's explanation of the way to understand how the food was "eaten" as a logical consequence of his theology and as nothing less than a denial of the plain meaning of the text.

¹Hanson, 105, sees this whole collection as "typology . . . trembling on the verge of allegory."

facets. He warns us against identifying the linguistic frontier between the Greek and semitic worlds with the cultural frontier between Hellenism and Judaism.¹

By the same token Justin has a good deal of familiarity with Jewish post-biblical milieu. Barnard carefully reviews Justin's use of the LXX, his acquaintance with Jewish customs, beliefs, exegeses, sects, etc., and rates it as generally accurate.²

The one element of Justin's thought which I would like to note in ending would be his acceptance of the Mamre story as factual (except for the consumption of the food). Obviously one cannot read the pre-Incarnate Christ back into fables. Justin took the Old Testament accounts to be factual and authoritative, even if awaiting Christian interpretation to reveal their full significance.³ Hanson notes⁴ that Justin "does not belittle the sense of history." Justin's use of allegory is rather small; Hanson notes that

The sources of his interpretation are evidently Rabbinic allegory, the example of the writers of the New Testament, and traditional typology, partly deriving from Jewish liturgy and partly from Mes-

¹Page 398.

²Pages 399-406.

³Shotwell ends his study of Paul's use of the Old Testament, pp. 50-55, with the remark that, in matters of exegesis, Justin was a "direct descendant" of Paul, in that the Old Testament exegeses of both are Christocentric.

⁴Page 108.

sianic and prophetic interpretation. All these are acted upon by an eager desire to find Christ everywhere in the Old Testament.¹

Justin's belief in the factuality of Old Testament events can also be inferred from his lack of dependence on Philo and the Jewish and Christian Alexandrian schools of allegorical interpretation.²

So we see that Justin looks at the Mamre event solely as an example of the activity of the pre-Incarnate Christ. His interest is apologetic and theological; he does not dwell on other elements in the story.

2. Irenaeus

We have a work attributed to Irenaeus, The Apostolic Preaching, but it exists only in an Armenian version.³ In section 44, Irenaeus says that the divine visitor at Mamre was the Son of God, accompanied by two angels, and he uses the Genesis 19, 24 proof that the Son rained fire from the Creator

¹Ibid.

²Hanson, p. 108; Barnard, 399, 406; Shotwell, 46, 96-98 (a close study of Philo and Justin on Gen. 18, 1-3 and 8).

³I consulted St. Irenaeus: Proof of the Apostolic Preaching, Joseph P. Smith, trans., Ancient Christian Writers Series, no. 16 (Newman, 1952), and Irénée de Lyon: Démonstration de la Prédication Apostolique, L. M. Froidevaux, trans., Sources Chrétiennes series (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1959). Smith provides an adequate overview of the history of the text, pp. 4-12, and several technical remarks with the translation itself. Froidevaux also discusses the state of the text, pp. 7-25, and has technical notes, including many patristic parallels. Quasten, I, 292-293, provides older bibliography.

of all things. Abraham was a prophet; he saw the Son of God in human form, who would in the future speak with men, eat with them,¹ and judge men for His Father.²

Irenaeus also mentions elsewhere that the Son spoke to Abraham several times³ but the Mamre incident is not specifically mentioned.

Thus we have the same desire on the part of Irenaeus to place Jesus in the Old Testament theophanies (in apologetic and polemic writings for Christians and Christian heretics), as we found in Justin (who was addressing himself to Jewish readers). In addition, however, Irenaeus does refer to the

¹We also have an Arabic fragment of a commentary on Genesis by Hippolytus of Rome, who claimed to be a disciple of Irenaeus (Quasten, II, 164; New Catholic Encyclopedia /McGraw Hill, 1967/ s.v. "Hippolytus of Rome, St.," by M. McGuire). The German translation of the Arabic can be found in vol. 1.2 of Die Griechischen Christlichen der Ersten Drei Jahrhunderte series (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1897-), p. 92, frag. 6, trans. H. Achelis. In this passage Hippolytus mentions that angels had come to Abraham at Mamre and had eaten food with him. The N.C.E. article, p. 1140, notes that Hippolytus' exegesis was usually literal, "with little trace of Alexandrian elaboration."

²In section 45 we find the same problem with the omnipresence of God the Father which Justin exhibited in Trypho 60, 2 and 127. The Son is the mediator with men, since the Father can never be seen by men or be limited to one location. Theophilus of Antioch, a contemporary, also shows the same philosophical presupposition in Ad Autolychum 2, 22 (P.G. 6, col. 1088), although he does not cite the Mamre story as an example. We will use the Patrologia Graeca series, J. P. Migne, ed., 168 vols. (Paris, 1857-1866), only when more recent editions and texts are not available.

³Adversus Haereses 4, 7, 4; 4, 9, 1; 4, 10, 1. S.C. Vol. 100.

future earthly life of Jesus and his speaking and eating with men at that time. The reference, however general and brief, does imply that historical types could be drawn between the lives of Abraham and Jesus.

3. Tertullian

With the writings of Tertullian we come to the African and Western Fathers.¹ Quasten reminds us of the great persecutions waged against Western Christians by non-believers, and of the great internal dissension caused by heretics.² His description of Tertullian will not be contradicted by the few Mamre citations which we have.

Except for St. Augustine, Tertullian is the most important and original ecclesiastical author in Latin. With a profound knowledge of philosophy, law, Greek and Latin letters, Tertullian combines inexhaustible vigor, burning rhetoric,

¹On Tertullian, see Quasten, II, 243-340. We do not possess a firm critical text of the Vetus Latina; in this paper I will use the Bueron Abbey edition and will note significant variant readings when necessary. Obviously, the Vetus is very close to the LXX. Thus ilicem and medio die in v. 1; super and super terram in v. 2; and the ante te of v. 3. In v. 4 laventur, as LXX, is not an imperative; panem in v. 5 is not qualified. Et postea may have had נאחזר for a Vorlage, or, more likely, simply the LXX. In v. 6 consperge tres mensuras similaginis is quite close to the LXX and ingriphios is a Greek loan word. At the start of v. 8, all our Vetus texts seem to lack a main verb; et ederunt comes earlier than in the MT. In v. 9 the opening dixit is singular as the LXX, unlike MT. In v. 10 the Vetus follows the LXX with the clumsy ad hoc tempus in futurum and the final post eum. The Vetus goes further than other versions in saying that Sarah was post ostium. The necdum mihi factum est usque nunc of v. 12 is close to the LXX; so are verbum and in tempore hoc . . . in futurum from v. 14. למדע is ignored. In v. 16 et Gomorrae is added, with LXX.

²Quasten, II, 243-246.

and biting satire. His attitude is uncompromising. Forever a fighter, he knew no relenting towards his enemies, whether pagans, Jews, heretics, or, later on, Catholics. All his writings are polemic.¹

Let us look briefly at Tertullian's use of the Mamre story. The writings De Carne Christi and De Resurrectione Carnis,² written around 210-212 A.D., were anti-Gnostic and anti-Docetic in intent.³ Tertullian's purpose is to prove the reality of Christ's Incarnation and of His bodily resurrection and, subsequently, the future bodily resurrection of all those who believe in Him.

In De Carne 3, 6, Tertullian observes

Sometimes you have read and believed that the Creator's angels have been changed into human form, and such a realness of flesh have they had that Abraham washed their feet.

In 3, 7 he compares this temporary⁴ but real incarnation with the greater Incarnation of Christ.

What therefore is allowed to angels inferior to God--that they remain angels even though changed into human flesh--you would take from God, who is more powerful. Is Christ not able, having truly become man, to continue to be God?

¹II, p. 247.

²Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina (Turnholt: Brepols, 1953-), vol. 2.

³Quasten specifies the Gnostic sects to be the followers of Marcion, Appelles, Basilides, and Valentinus.

⁴Tertullian assumes that the flesh used by the angels is not retained after the mission is over. He does not care to explain the process, noting that "if you had seen when it had been brought forth from nothingness, you would also know when it was sent back into nothingness" (3, 7).

Presumably these and other like arguments were directed against the Docetism of Marcion.

Later, in De Carne 6, 3-5, Tertullian refutes the objection (held by Appeles) that Jesus may have been given flesh in the manner of the enfleshment of the angels at Mamre (i.e., nulla uteri opera) rather than within Mary.

Tertullian objects that the motives (causas) for the angels' incarnation were not as exalted as was the motive of Jesus; "No angel ever came down to be crucified, to experience death, or to be raised from the dead." A few lines further on, in 6, 8, Tertullian suggests that Jesus was at Mamre with the angels in order to practice dealing with men, learning how to speak with them and free them and judge them.¹

In the last section of Tertullian's De Resurrectione (62), he studies the state of our own bodies after resurrection. We will be tamquam angeli, as Scripture says in Luke 20, 36 (and Matt. 22, 30). This phrase must not be misunderstood.

Angels have sometimes been as if men, in eating and drinking and putting forward their feet for washing; they have put on a human form without change to their proper nature (substantia) within.

It follows then that men can become as if angels without

¹We are reminded of Irenaeus' description in Apostolic Preaching, 44.

losing their true humanness. This same theme is dwelt on through all of Ch. 62.¹

In Adversus Praxean we find Tertullian dealing with another heresy--Patripassianism.² This is an overidentification of God the Father and Jesus to such an extent that Jesus really ceases to be separate in any way. In 10, 7-8, we find the heretics asking why God the Son could not have generated God the Father. Tertullian admits that God can do all things; He can bring a child to a barren woman or to a virgin--nothing is too difficult for God. However, the fact that God can do something does not mean that He has actually done it. The

¹In Adversus Marcionem (C.C. v. 1), Tertullian battles the theories of Marcion, who set up a dichotomy between the God of the OT and that of the NT. In the third book he deals with Marcion's assertion that the OT Messiah was not Jesus and had not yet in fact come. In 3, 9, 1-5, Tertullian again reviews the idea that the angels at Mamre had real flesh,

"The question is whether the angels in a vision, having merely putative flesh, dealt with Abraham and Lot, and yet truly met and ate and worked as was their commission."

He replies that they did have real flesh, made of real matter even though it had not been conceived and born in the usual way. In his reply, Tertullian never refers to the eating or working again. Context indicates that he believed that they truly ate.

In 3, 9, 6, we read that Christ appeared with the angels, "and He appeared in the genuineness of the flesh with the angels to Abraham. The flesh was not yet born, since it was not yet going to die, but it was learning how to deal with men."

In 3, 9, 7, Tertullian again refers to the fact that the disposal of the angelic flesh is of no concern to us and also that God can transform us someday like unto angels, as in Luke 20, 36.

²C.C. v. 2. Quasten, II, 285, considers Tertullian's writings opposing Praxeas to be "the most important contribution to the doctrine of the Trinity in the ante-Nicene period."

allusions to Sarah and Mary and Gen. 18, 14 are only that, and are used no more in the course of the argument.

In Adversus Praxean 16, 6-7, we are told that all appearances and direct dealings by God in the Old Testament are actually experiences had by Christ. How could the unbounded omnipresent Father have come down and rested at Abraham's camp under the oak? The heretics are unaware that from the beginning the whole order of divine dealings has been channeled through the Son.

We have seen this problem with the omnipresence of the Father before, in Justin and in Irenaeus; here also it can lead to subordinationist tendencies concerning Christ, even in a writer who did so much to initiate classical Trinitarian formulae.¹

Tertullian's considerations concerning the nature of Christ's incarnation in Mary, and of our own resurrection after death, are theological ones and do not really use much of the Mamre story. His remark that the pre-Incarnate Jesus was "learning how to deal with men" at Mamre could have been the basis for drawing out types involving Jesus' earthly life.

4. Novatian

Novatian,² like Tertullian and other early apologists,

¹Quasten, II, pp. 324-327. Quasten also notes, pp. 319-320, that Tertullian was never interested in drawing up consistent theological systems, nor in bringing harmony between faith and philosophy.

²See Quasten, II, 212-233, especially 217-218. Also N.C.E., "Novatian and Novatianism," by P. H. Weyer.

assumes that Jesus, as subordinate to the Father, performs all the actual Old Testament visitations.

In De Trinitate 18 Novatian tells us that, by these apparitions, men are learning how to gradually approach God the Father.¹

For Christ is the image of the invisible God, that the weakness and frailty of the human condition might get used to seeing the Father someday in the image, that is, in the Son. For gradually and by stages human frailty had to be built up by the image to the glory of someday being able to see God the Father.

At Mamre, Abraham saw three men, but he called one of them by the name Lord. Novatian points out that if one were to object that Abraham could just as easily be calling the chief angel by the title lord, it is clearly stated in vv. 1 and 14 that Deus is involved. This is a title not properly given to an angel. This Lord, then, is Christ.²

Novatian then mentions the washing of the feet of the disciples by Jesus in a beautiful passage.³

¹This was written some years before 250 A.D. Our text is from Novatian: De Trinitate, W. Y. Fausset, ed., Cambridge Patristic Texts (Cambridge, England, 1909), pp. 62-63. Weyer notes (p. 535) that De Trinitate was meant to bring the teaching on the Trinity down to his time.

"In it he defends the oneness of Almighty God, and God the Creator, against the Gnostics; Christ as the Son of God the Creator, against Marcion; Christ as true man, against the Docetists; as true God, against the Adoptionists, etc."

Our selections would presumably counter Marcion's errors.

²Page 65.

³Pages 65-66.

He was acting in symbol (in sacramento) by being Abraham's guest; He would be among the sons of Abraham again someday and He would wash their feet to prove that it was He; He repaid to the sons the law of hospitality which father Abraham had once extended to Him.

Note that the concept of Christ repaying Abraham's descendants (the Apostles) for Abraham's good deed is similar to the Rabbinic "merit" concept.

Novatian's remark that at Mamre Abraham, as a representative of mankind, was learning to deal with God is simply the opposite side of the idea of Irenaeus and Tertullian that there God was learning to deal with men. It too could have been a basis for discussing events in the life of Jesus.

The first firm example of a historical type involving Mamre is certainly Novatian's linking of the footwashing with Christ's similar action at the Last Supper.

B. Alexandrian Hermeneutics

1. Philo

At this point in our study, we should turn our attention to Alexandria and to the Jewish writer Philo.¹

¹I am indebted to R. P. C. Hanson, Allegory and Event, second chapter, "Alexandrian and Hellenistic Allegory," pp. 37-64; and to an article by V. Nikiprowetzky, "L'exégèse de Philon D'Alexandrie," Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses 53 (1973), 309-329. I used Philo, F. Colson, G. Whitaker, and R. Marcus, eds., 10 vols. and 2 supplementary vols. on the Armenian commentaries on Genesis and Exodus. Loeb Classical Library series (Harvard, 1929-1953). There are other editions of the Greek text available such as Leopold Cohn and Paul Wendland, Philonis Alexandri Opera, Berlin, 1896--and Les Oeuvres de Philon D'Alexandrie, Paris, which is scheduled to be a 36 volume work when completed.

Hanson offers a good summation¹ of the Hellenistic and Alexandrian Jewish antecedents to Philo, such as Aristobulus and Pseudo-Aristeas, focusing primarily on the use made by these writers of allegory. Hanson is interested in the practical effects of such Alexandrian Jewish allegorizing on Scripture. He notes that the allegorizing of certain Mosaic laws in the Letter of Aristeas

presents us with unmistakable allegory and the biblical texts are allegorized, not into Messianic prophecies nor types of the Law, but into moral examples and exhortations. We shall find exactly the same treatment of the Law in Philo, and later still in the Epistle of Barnabas, in Clement of Alexandria and in Origen; but this is the first known appearance of such an interpretation, and it is remarkable that in effect it empties the regulation of its literal force, making this merely the outward pretext for an inner moral meaning.²

The influence of Greek allegorical methods upon the Jews of Alexandria seems to have been stronger than Rabbinic hermeneutical methods. Hanson remarks

It is obvious that the allegorizing of Scripture is a firmly established tradition in Philo's milieu by Philo's day, and it is interesting that those allegorizations tend to transmute the words of the biblical text into either philosophy or natural science, not into references to the Law and the chosen people, or into Messianic prophecies, as we should expect had Philo and his predecessors been influenced by the Rabbinic, presumably Palestinian, tradition of allegorizing.³

¹Pages 37-46.

²Page 44.

³Page 45.

Hanson then examines¹ Philo's own extensive use of allegory, noting his sharing in "many traits in biblical exegesis with the Palestinian Rabbinic tradition."² These traits would include a great reverence for every word in Scripture, the method of collecting together all the instances in the Pentateuch of a certain word or phrase, and the juxtaposition of texts.

Philo usually allegorizes the text into moral or psychological lessons and frequently carries over the main allegorical attributes of a person or place into many of the different biblical passages where this person or place is mentioned. Thus Abraham will often be taken as representing wisdom gained by divine teaching.³ Sarah represents virtue; Isaac stands for joy or for natural (self-taught) virtue.⁴

These moral or psychological allegorical meanings, whether drawn from persons, events, or places, are not types

¹Pages 46-53.

²Pages 46-47.

³Loeb, v. 1, p. xxiv. V. 6, pp. x-xi; Colson remarks on p. xi that "it is difficult to see how Abraham pre-eminently represents wisdom acquired by teaching."

⁴An example might help here. In Deterius, 59-61, we are told that when God asks questions of humans, it is for their benefit and not for His. When He asks Abraham, "Where is your virtue (i.e., Sarah)?" the patriarch answers, "in the tent (i.e., in the soul)." Possessing virtue is not a satisfactory state. God must send down the joy of putting virtue into practice, just as He gave Isaac to Sarah. Abraham learns then, from his own answer, that without God's help, virtue is insufficient.

by Hanson's definition--the interpreting of an event belonging to the present or recent past as the fulfillment of a similar situation recorded or prophesied in Scripture. Philo's lack of interest in typology is a reflection of his lack of interest in eschatology or Messianic expectation.¹ Hanson also notes that Philo "is not even much interested in historical events, for his attitude to history is ambiguous."²

Let us now look at Philo's comments on the Mamre story. The longest commentary is to be found in De Abraham, 22-25 (paragraphs 107-132). In the first part of his study, Philo briefly recounts the story; the following is a summary.

- 107 Philo speaks of Abraham's kindnessness (φιλανθρωπία); he saw three travellers in the form of men, whose more divine nature was not perceivable. He invited them to enjoy his hospitality and they quickly agreed, impressed more by his intentions than by his words alone.

¹Pages 41 and 49.

²Page 49. Hanson then lists, pp. 49-52, examples of specific biblical events which Philo admits to be historical, but about which he prefers to concentrate on the allegorical meanings almost exclusively. He then lists a middle group of examples where the literal and allegorical treatments are about evenly handled; e.g., in treating of Abraham, Philo seems to be more ready to allow the historicity of specific biblical events altogether. F. H. Colson, *Loeb v. 1*, pp. xiii-xiv, draws the same conclusion that Philo does not care for the mere historical content of O.T. events.

Hanson, pp. 52-53, examines Philo's attitude toward observance of Jewish laws and customs and finds that he generally holds for their observance, even if he is not interested in the content of a law for anything other than its allegorical meanings. Colson, *v. 1*, p. xiv, agrees with this finding.

- 108 Abraham's soul was full of joy at their coming and he and his family rushed to prepare the meal.
- 109 Indeed, no one is slow at kindness in the house of a wise man such as Abraham.
- 110 The three visitors feasted, not so much on the food as on the good will and great unbounded generosity of their host. They promised him a son in the time to come. This promise was made by the one of the three who was the chief, since it would have been unrefined for all three to talk at once.
- 111 Abraham and Sarah at first did not believe the message, because of their old age.
- 112 In fact Sarah laughed at the message, but afterwards, when they¹ said that God can do all things, she was ashamed for she knew that they were correct.
- 113 This serious thought after her initial laughter brought Sarah to a deeper appreciation of what was going on
 Then, it seems to me, was the first moment that she apprehended their more grand essence (unlike what they had first seemed to be), either of prophets or angels who were changed from their spiritual and soul-like selves into human form.
- 114 Really, Abraham's greatest virtue was not hospitality, but rather fear of God (θεοσεβεια).
- 115 The angels would not have thought so much as to peep into the tent if they had seen any deep-rooted passions in the souls of those who were dwelling inside.
- 116 They only allowed the feast to take place because they regarded Abraham as a relative and fellow servant of the same God. Abraham and his whole house made more advance in virtue as a result of the arrival of the visitors.
- 118 Philo thinks that the angels only seemed to eat; even more significant is the fact that they took

¹Neither the MT nor the LXX identify the speaker of Gen. 18, 14.

on the form of men, being incorporeal by nature, to do a good deed to the courteous Abraham. The whole miracle of the coming of the three visitors had as its purpose to assure Abraham that the Father had not failed to notice that he was such a man (i.e., wise).

At this point Philo declares that he will look for deeper (allegorical) meanings in the text, having already presented the literal sense (τῆς ὀντικῆς ἀποδόσεως).

- 119 Whenever the soul is illuminated by God, as at noonday . . . the underlying object presents to the soul a triple vision; one vision is real while the other two are shadows cast by it.
- 120 Neither of the two shadows could be God.
- 121 Rather the middle figure, the underlying one, is the Father of the universe, He who is. The two shadows are the senior and nearest powers, the creative and the kingly. The creative power is called θεός because He made (ἐποίησεν) all things and the kingly power is called κύριος since He who makes also has the right to rule and control (ἀρχεῖν καὶ κρατεῖν).
- 122 Thus God and His two powers can appear to those favored with visions in either a single or a triple mode. The single mode is reserved to the most virtuous. The triple mode is for those who can only comprehend the deity either through His creative or ruling activities.
- 124 If we assume that there are three classes of men, and that only the most virtuous are favored with the single mode of appearance by God, then the creative power stands to the Father's right and can appear as beneficent to the middle class of men, and the least virtuous men may see the ruling power on the left.
- 126-130 Digression on God's love for all three classes of men.
- 131-132 Philo notes that the change to single modes of address in Gen: 18, 3 and 18, 10 reminds us that Abraham is really dealing with He who is, the

underlying one. Therefore, Abraham belongs to the most virtuous class of men.

Philo's other, briefer, comments can be put into the following four groups.

A. The Theme of Theophany

In De Migratione 165, we have an etymology for Mamre as a place name; it means "from seeing" or "from vision,"¹ and symbolically refers to a life of contemplation.²

In De Cherubim 106, Philo says that, if we prepare our soul with much learning and study, then the divine powers will descend, bringing laws and ordinances for our salvation. They will dwell with us, sowing roots of happiness, just as they gave Isaac to Sarah in gratitude for their stay with Abraham.

In De Sacrificiis, 58-60, the topic is eagerness to serve God. Cain was not eager; he delayed offering sacrifices. Abraham, however, hastened to have Sarah (virtue) make ἐγκρυφίας. Thus the soul which has seen God and His two highest powers, sovereignty and goodness, will "knead" and "blend" this gracious manifestation within itself. The story of these mysteries must be buried (κεκρύφθαι) and kept from outsiders.³

¹Presumably based on the phrase מן הַרְאָה

²In para. 164, Abraham had given the land of Mamre to Eschol and Aunon, who were possessed of naturally good ways and were lovers of vision (φιλοθεάμονας).

³Hanson, p. 47, notes that this stress on the idea of burying or hiding, which is derived from ἐγκρυφίας, is one example of Philo's uncritical trust in the LXX as a faithful rendition of the Hebrew sense of the words.

B. "Masculine" Virtues and "Feminine" Vices

Philo frequently refers to virtues and vices as being represented in Scripture by the categories of male and female, respectively.

Thus in De Cherubim 8, we read of Isaac being given to Abraham and Sarah. They were older and more virtuous now; they had both died to the emotions and to the "ways of women." In Deterius 28, Sarah alone leaves the ways of women (passions) and so should we also go over from these to the "masculine" traits of good desires.¹ Sarah (virtue) is returned to the

¹It is possible that Philo's allegorical equation of masculine gender to our better actions and inclinations, and of feminine gender to our lower ones, represents a development of Rabbinic remarks such as we saw in grouping 12 of Ch. I of this dissertation. Some Christian commentators will imitate him (Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Ambrose, and Gregory the Great).

There is another way of considering virtues and vices in mutual opposition which goes back at least to Tertullian's De Spectaculis 29, 5 (C.C. 1, p. 252) and to Prudentius' Psychomachia. In these writings the virtues and vices are allegorized as feminine, insofar as human images are used. This tradition, as A. E. M. Katzenellenbogen has shown, is well represented in medieval iconography. See his Allegories of the Virtues and Vices in Medieval Art (London, 1939; reprinted New York: Norton, 1964). In the preface of the Psychomachia, lines 45-68, Prudentius does mention the theophany at Mamre, but his main interest is in the battle of Genesis 14. Text can be found in vol. 1 of Prudentius, H. J. Thompson, ed., 2 vols., Loeb Classical Library series (Harvard Press, 1949), 276-279.

The Greek genders for the vocabulary which Philo normally used to describe virtue, good desires, passions, and emotions do not coincide with the genders in his allegorical system. On the other hand, the majority of the Latin nouns which depict the various virtues and vices are abstract and feminine, and so might provide some basis for the exclusively feminine Christian iconography.

rank of pure virgin (higher virtue) when she ceases to have periods; this note is found in De Cherubim 50 and, similarly, in De Posteritate 134.

In De Ebrietate 59-62, Philo talks about the claim that many make that they will not be affected by riches, honors, or the like. He says that this claim often fails when we actually come within reach of such riches or honors. So we still follow the ways of women. Sarah was able to abandon such ways; having done so she exulted in the joy given by God, and she counted as laughable the cares which most men have.¹

In De Migratione 126, Philo discusses the merits which a righteous Noah or Abraham or whoever can bring upon his fellow men. Philo muses, citing Gen. 18, 10, that virtue will always be around in some form,

which the undue seasons of men can probably overshadow, but the time which is an attendant on God can reveal again. In a time such as this the "male" thought (Sarah) blossoms, not according to the temporal hours of the year, but according to untimed zeniths and seasons.

C. Sarah's Laughter

Philo takes a benign view of Sarah's laughter. In De Mutat. Nom. 166, he speaks of the deep spiritual joys which righteous people can have in the graces to come. For example,

¹Similar categorizations of faults and vices as "female" can be found in De Fuga 128 and 167, where the "ways" are our human and rational customs, and vaguely in De Somniis 2, 185.

Sarah laughed when she heard of her blessed son to be, this carefree, self-sprung good, saying "He who promised is my Lord and is older than all creation; it is necessary to believe in Him."¹

In De Abraham 206, the topic is that joy and sorrow are both ingredients in our lives.

It is on account of this fact, it seems to me, that Sarah (virtue) first laughs and then denies the laughter to the one who questions her. She was afraid lest she be appropriating joy proper to God alone and not to creatures. Therefore the holy word encouraged her, saying, "Do not be afraid; indeed you laughed, and there is a share of joy for you."²

D. The Final Escorting

In De Migrat. 173-175, we have a brief allegory on Abraham's escorting of the angels as they left for Sodom. The context of the remarks has to do with the pitfalls involved in seeking after wealth, honors, etc. We should desire to stay close to God at all times and not to venture out on our own.

. . . he who follows God of necessity will have the words (customarily called angels) which attend on God as his fellow travellers.

¹Here, and in Leg. All. 3, 218, Philo is giving his own interpretation that Sarah's phrase, "my Lord is old," in Gen. 18, 12, applies to God and not to Abraham!

²So also in Leg. All. 3, 218, we find Sarah joyful. "She laughed in her mind and said, 'There has not been happiness to me until now and my Lord, the divine word, is greater, to whom belongs this happiness by necessity, and He is to be believed when He promises good.'"

Similar remarks on human joy can be found in De Spec. Leg. 2, 54-55. There God reassures Sarah that creatures are not entirely denied joy.

Abraham did this sort of following at Mamre and was rewarded.

O excellent parity, by which the escorter is escorted. Being the giver, he instead receives.

Another work attributed to Philo¹ contains almost all of the observations and allegories which we have mentioned on these pages. Here I will just mention briefly two new items peculiar to Questions and Answers on Genesis, which later Christians echo.² Loeb page numbers are on the left.

268 Abraham's seated posture represents "a state of tranquillity and peace of body."

269 Our virtue should "watch" our senses as Abraham "watched" at his tent door.

Conclusions Concerning Philo

The contrast between Philo's use of the Mamre account and the Rabbinic traditions which we collected in Chapter I is striking, but I am inclined toward caution in stressing the differences between them.

Admittedly we find no references to other O.T. passages in these excerpts from Philo, but this is possibly due

¹Questions and Answers on Genesis, Loeb, Philo Supplement, vol. 1, 1953, Ralph Marcus trans. Our selection is from book 4, 1-20, pp. 265-293. The manuscript ultimately depends upon a 5th century Armenian text, presumably translated from the Greek. I will use Marcus' English translation exclusively. The style of this work is more elaborate than other writings of Philo, but I think that the content of these 20 paragraphs is certainly very similar to what we already have found in Philo. In restricting myself to noting the few items which seem to filter into later Christian traditions, I do not mean to cast judgment on the genuineness of the rest of the text.

²I am not implying direct borrowing.

to the fact that Philo was writing at least some of his commentaries for Gentile audiences.¹

We find almost no elaboration on the details of the meal and the hospitality involved. There is also no direct parallel in Philo to the "merit" lessons of the Rabbis. However we must recall that Philo's writings are possibly older than a good deal of the Rabbinic traditions.

We could even say that, with regard to paragraphs 107-118 of De Abraham, Philo is in effect interested in the account along basically Jewish lines; the principal allegory of paras. 119-132 (the vision of God and His two powers) is meant to explain the same problems in the text which the Rabbis will explain by interpretative use of the Shekinah concept.²

¹Colson, Loeb, v. 6, pp. xi, xii, and xv n., points out that elsewhere Philo does cite many O.T. texts in his exegeses.

²Nikiprowetzky's article concerning Philo's exegetical work can be very helpful here. He is interested in reviewing Philo's Jewish concepts rather than his Greek background (p. 320). This study leads Nikiprowetzky to an appreciation, based on the Synagogue services in Alexandria and on the format of Questions and Answers on Genesis, and on Exodus, that Philo almost always subordinates allegory to the prior duty of explicating any problems in the text (323, 325). The other commentaries of Philo are studied literary adaptations of the Questions format. Further, Nikiprowetzky postulates that the Platonic theme of a "spiritual migration" underlies all of Philo's thought (326-327).

The problem of how to control the use of allegory was not a real one for Philo. He relied on a "general understanding of the biblical text, a certain linguistic approach, or philosophical inspiration," in each case to guide him in his exegesis (328). The only principle more basic for Philo than

Although he is Jewish and may well have appreciated the structure of the Pentateuch, Philo obviously uses some hermeneutical principles from his Greek background. In addition to his analysis of Philo and other Alexandrian Jewish allegorizers, Hanson gives a brief history of Hellenistic allegory up through Plutarch.¹ Hanson concludes

By the third century at latest it (Hellenistic allegory) had become almost part of the intellectual atmosphere in which educated men moved, in a position perhaps comparable to that held by the theory of evolution in our day.

This Hellenistic allegory was characterized by being entirely unhistorical; it took no account at all of the historical situation, and very little of the original meaning, of the material allegorized. It was not only arbitrary; it required no sense of history at all; the results of its allegorization were general statements of a philosophical or psychological or scientific nature. What we have called typology was wholly unknown to it.

In spite of the remarkable historical accident that the first extensive examples of this allegory are found, not in Hellenistic, but in Jewish writers, Aristobulus, Pseudo-Aristeas, and Philo, it is clear

the "general understanding" just mentioned was his determination to avoid any systematic denial of the literal sense of the text (328. Hanson is offended by any denials; Nikiprowetzky is looking for patterns among them.).

Since Philo saw allegory as an aid to exegesis, even though a rich and many faceted one, we should not look on his literal and allegorical comments as mutually exclusive. Nikiprowetzky sees the different commentaries of Philo as forming one system, applied to different sections of the Bible. This system is an imitation of the very structure of the pentateuch itself, perhaps best expressed by the terms *Cosmopoietica*, *Historica*, and *Nomothetica*. Thus Philo does have an overall view of the Pentateuch and the importance it plays in the life of the Jewish people. This view is what unites his work, even as the varied allegories often distract us from seeing that unity.

¹Pages 55-62.

that we must conclude that Alexandrian allegory was derived from Hellenistic.¹

The process by which Alexandrian Jews "derived" their use of allegory from Hellenistic influences must be spelled out very carefully to include those positive influences from their Jewish religion, but Hanson emphasizes once again that the lack of interest in history is not modified in the process.

But Alexandrian allegory has in all its forms one feature in common with Hellenistic allegory; it is unhistorical. It does not use typology. Its ultimate aim is to empty the text of any particular connection with historical events. Even in the matter of allegorizing the Torah we can safely conclude that the Alexandrian allegorists saw no profound significance in its literal meaning, however cautiously they may have expressed their conviction. Philo can see no point in history as history; to him it is simply so much material to be allegorized into philosophy.²

We will conclude our consideration of Philonic exegesis by noting, with Hanson, that Philo was imitated by Alexandrian Christians, but apparently not by his coreligionists.

Philo's use of allegory, then, marks him and the tradition in which he stands as taking an attitude to the Old Testament Scriptures in several important points quite distinct from that of Palestinian Judaism. Philo used allegory not only to emancipate himself from the literal meaning of the text, but also from its relation to history, and also to some extent from the obligation to observe the Jewish Torah in full. We know of almost no direct successors to Philo; with him, as far as we know, the line of Alexandrian Jewish thought ended. Pharisaic Judaism took over the direction of Jewish thought after the fall of Jerusalem, and in its

¹Page 62.

²Page 63.

schools a speculative, Hellenistic Judaism was impossible. The heirs of Philo's system--in its own way a noble and admirable system--were the theologians of the Christian Church.¹

2. Clement

The first Alexandrian Christian to use Philo's approach to the Scriptures was Clement,² who died in 215 A.D. Clement was not merely an imitator; he was capable of making his own interpretations,³ and many of these were of a very practical sort. Hanson notes that Clement "does not indeed show quite the same tendency to undermine historical narratives by allegory as Philo does."⁴

In Pedagogus 3, 10, Sarah and Abraham are praised for their personal physical effort in hosting the visitors at Mamre.⁵

In Stromata 4, 19, Sarah is praised for her humility in that she herself baked the bread for the angels. In 6, 12 the topic is how women also may grow in knowledge and virtue.

¹Page 53.

²See Quasten II, 1-36; Hanson, 117-120; and R. M. Grant, Letter and Spirit, 85-89. The Pedagogus text can be found in G.C.S. 12 (reprinted in 1972); Stromata is in G.C.S. 52. See also J. E. Cullen and H. Chadwick, Alexandrian Christianity (London: S.C.M. Press, 1954), pp. 15-39. Chadwick notes Clement's use of other sources such as Philo (p. 21).

³Hanson, p. 118.

⁴Page 120.

⁵The subject of this chapter is the benefits of physical exercise! Quasten (II, 10) calls books 2 and 3 "a kind of casuistry for all spheres of life."

In so growing, a woman is becoming more "man-like," to use Philo's image.¹

I think these remarks of Clement's² are too few in number for further comment, except to agree with Hanson that Clement seems to accept the literal facts of the Genesis account.

3. Origen

We come now to Origen (c. 185-254), the leading representative of the Alexandrian Christian school of biblical commentators.³ Origen's life was one of intense intellectual and

¹The Stromata deal with "moral perfection, consisting of chastity and love of God," and are anti-Gnostic writings (Quasten II, 14). The Stromata 6, 12 reference is as follows, "And is not thus a woman changed into a man, when she becomes equally unfeminine and manly and perfect. Such then was the laughter of Sarah when she had been informed of the birth of a son; not, I think, that she disbelieved the angel but that she felt ashamed of the renewed intercourse by which she was destined to become the mother of a son."

²There is a very brief reference to Abraham's faith in Jesus at Mamre in Stromata 5, 1, but the Scripture citation is actually from Gen. 17, 8. A reference in Pseudo-Clement Homily 20, 7 (G.C.S. 42) mentions the angels who took on real flesh for their visit at Mamre; such spiritual beings who can undergo change cannot be immortal.

³See Quasten, II, 37-101; R. P. C. Hanson, Allegory and Event and also a smaller, earlier work, Origen's Doctrine of Tradition, London, 1954. Hanson citations will be from Allegory and Event unless otherwise noted. See also Daniélou, Origen, W. Mitchell, trans. (Sheed and Ward, 1955), pp. 131-199. Daniélou recalls Origen's linguistic and textual studies, his work on the canon of biblical books, and his use of typology. Daniélou, of course, regards Origen's use of types favorably (esp. pp. 148-149), although he allows that Origen usually preferred types which spoke of the inner spiritual life of individuals (pp. 163-164). Finally, Origen's use of

Church activity,¹ involving him in controversies on biblical questions with a broad range of Christian heretics, Alexandrian Jews, and pagans.² Unfortunately, many of his works are available to us only in Latin translations by Rufinus, Jerome, and others. Rufinus, at least, was capable of modifying statements of Origen's for doctrinal reasons.³

Origen's writings include commentaries on specific books of the Old and New Testaments, and collections of homilies. Quasten regards the homilies as more pastoral than the commentaries, and, by implication, less scholarly.⁴ Hanson has a higher opinion of the scholarly content of Origen's homilies.⁵ On the Mamre passage, we have about equal amounts of material from both homilies and commentaries, with the longest excerpt being from a Genesis homily.

The biblical student who wishes to understand Origen's

non-Christian allegorical devices is studied. Philo and Origen were too eager to find spiritual meanings in every Scriptural passage (pp. 181-182), which led them to very uneven evaluations of certain specific biblical events.

¹Quasten II, 37-40.

²Hanson, 133-161, depicts the spectrum: Marcionites (135), Predestinarians (142), literalists (149), "Judaizing" Christians (152), polemical Rabbis (154), Ebionites (157), and pagans, especially Celsus (159).

³Hanson, Origen's Doctrine of Tradition, pp. 40-47.

⁴Page 47, "These works thus belong to the history of Christian spirituality and mysticism rather than to biblical science."

⁵Page 184.

exegetical and hermeneutical presuppositions would do well to read Hanson's analysis at the outset.¹ While Hanson is often distressed at Origen's specific allegories, he does provide us with a historical and analytical overview which can help anyone wishing to study Origen's use of a particular passage from Scripture.

Origen's use of Scripture Texts

Origen, like Philo, relied usually on the LXX, although he does seem to have known some Hebrew. A case can be made for the proposition that Origen did not value the LXX above the Hebrew text.²

Hanson describes the format Origen uses when commenting upon a verse.³ Origen tries to see the text in context of the whole Bible, but he often ignores the context of the particular book in which the text was found. He seeks some immediately edifying meaning from the passage and so sometimes cuts his own work short. He handles phrases and words in detail, referring to many other parts of the Bible, and then replies to objections and difficulties.⁴ Many times Origen evidences a correct grasp of the intent of a passage, even if he is perhaps too rational in working with it.

¹Our concern here is with pp. 187-374, especially pp. 235-288.

²Hanson, p. 177.

³Page 179.

⁴We are reminded of Philo's exegetical format (Hanson, 50).

This tendency toward the rational and the intellectual is pervasive and occurs in the homilies as well as in the commentaries.

Origen began as a philosopher and never ceased to be a philosopher, though as a Christian priest he saw the necessity and usefulness of applying his philosophy to the personal problems of ordinary men and women. We must not forget that Origen and Clement of Alexandria formulated and openly professed a doctrine of Reserve; there were certain mysteries of the faith which could not be publicly declared to the unintelligent and uneducated, but only to the cultured Christian intelligentsia.¹

Origen's theory of Biblical Inspiration

Origen has a very strong concept of biblical inspiration--that every verbal detail was directly inspired by God. Hanson remarks that "Origen's theory of inspiration very often drives him into exasperatingly atomistic exegesis, just because he is determined to believe that every verse, and sometimes every word, is an oracle in itself, independently of its context."²

We must reflect too on the fact that Origen regards both Testaments as equally referring to Jesus. His exegesis passes back and forth between the two Testaments with regularity. Hanson points to the problem that this approach engenders.

¹Hanson, p. 186. Quasten also notes the division Origen makes between ordinary men and the elite, on pp. 91-92 and 94-95 of v. II.

²Page 188.

A conception of inspiration such as this one rested necessarily upon a conviction of the inseparable unity of Scripture, and this is a theme of which Origen never tires. In fact what he is contending for is not so much the unity as the uniformity of Scripture. A modern theologian might think of the unity of the Bible as like the unity of a tapestry in which there are a multitude of different strands, and different colours and patterns woven by these strands into a single theme or picture. Origen's conception of the unity of Scripture is more like that of the steel shell of a ship, in which a number of different but uniform plates of steel are welded into one.¹

One way, which we have seen used before, to express the inseparable relationship of the two Testaments is the reading of a pre-Incarnate Christ back into scenes in the Old Testament. Origen, however, carries this approach very far; so far in fact that Hanson finds it unjustified.

It in fact consists in turning the Old Testament into an intellectual dress rehearsal for the New, not in the sense that in the Old Testament are found conceptions of God which achieve at once their focus and their embodiment in the New, but in such a way that the Old Testament contains the whole gospel contained in the New--Christology, ministry, sacraments, everything--only presented in the Old as a number of intellectual propositions apprehended by the enlightened, instead of enacted on the stage of history and associated with an historical figure, as in the New Testament. This seems to me not only a superfluous and indeed misleading piece of speculation but a complete misunderstanding of what the Old Testament, and indeed the whole Bible, conceives to be the method of revelation, the way in which God meets man.²

Origen's view of the unity of the two Testaments was coupled with a desire to use any passage as an aid to an alle-

¹Pages 198-199.

²Page 204.

gory or a proof. The Bible was thus used as if it were "a vast series of oracles which might or might not have some connective with each other, but which each in its own right had some divine or mysterious truth to convey."¹

Hanson notes that Origen's theory of biblical inspiration was essentially a defense of the Bible.

It ought to be obvious that Origen's doctrine is not founded upon any secure foundations. It was very largely a theological expedient resorted to in order to justify his particular "oracular" treatment of the Bible, and to place it securely beyond the reach of Marcionites, Gnostics and Literalists; and it was made possible only by the unlimited use of allegory. It is totally unscriptural, totally uncritical, totally unreal.²

Origen's theory of Accommodation

While Origen consistently holds for an "oracular" approach to the inspired Bible, he tempers his actual exegesis by his rationalistic categories. Thus he downplays any hints of predestination, transmigration of souls (although he has a similar concept of the preexistence of souls), God's foreknowledge of events, and so on. One other rationalizing tendency which must be mentioned is his studied disinterest in detail. Hanson refers to details as the "particularity" of Scripture.

. . . rationalism is inevitably suspicious of what modern theologians call the particularity of God's revelation in the Old Testament, that is, its in-

¹Page 367.

²Pages 208-209.

volvement with local, ephemeral, and often apparently trivial or even improper details and situations, and Origen accordingly strives to dissolve this particularity into general truths and abstract principles.¹

The end result of Origen's reliance on human rational powers as a counterbalance to his view of biblical inspiration was his theory that the Bible itself contained expressions which were meant to convey ideas to immature and imperfect men in a simpler way. In other words, Scripture accommodated its message to men.² Hanson credits Origen for his effort, which comes near to explaining our modern theory of progressive revelation, but he points out that Origen felt compelled to assign this immaturity to the audience to whom the Scriptures were addressed rather than to the human writer of the passage.³

Three Senses of Scripture

In his theoretical discussions about Scripture Origen frequently expressed his belief that there were three meanings in Scripture--the literal, moral, and spiritual (or intellec-

¹Page 219.

²See Hanson, pp. 224-231. Hanson wonders if one of the precursors of this theory of accommodation, which can also be found in Philo and Clement, was Rabbinic exegesis. He offers as an example the Rabbinic exegesis of the "peace" theme, wherein divine "white lies for peace" are recorded. We had such a case in Ch. I about God not repeating Sarah's jibe to Abraham. I would think that one way to test this speculation would be to see if Philo used any such Rabbinic themes. Philo did not do so with the Mamre "peace" theme, as far as I can see.

³Page 231.

tual);¹ in practice he often failed to develop the moral sense. Hanson postulates that the two categories of moral and spiritual meaning were simply not distinct enough for consistent application to sequential biblical passages, and that the moral sense became absorbed in the spiritual.² Further, when we examine the methods and results of Origen's allegorizing we find no systems; Hanson calls the spiritual allegory "protean"³ and "unchartably subjective."⁴ He even refers to its use by Origen as sometimes reducing the Bible to "a divine cross-word puzzle the solution to whose clues is locked in Origen's bosom."⁵ The material is often handled with psychological and ethical allegories of the Hellenistic type which

¹Hanson, p. 235. In *Exégèse Médiévale*, 4 vols. (Paris: Aubier, 1959-1964) 1, 1, 198-207, H. De Lubac discerns two different exegetical systems in Origen's writings. One is the well known progression of literal, moral, and allegorical meanings (supposedly analagous to man's body, soul, and spirit). In this system the moral meanings are frequently not developed, or are not specifically Christian in content if they are developed.

The second pattern is a progression of literal, allegorical, and moral meanings. In this pattern the literal meanings are more often shown to have ecclesial or sacramental import, the allegorical derivations are more deeply Christological, and the moral senses developed upon these other meanings bring more asceticism and more specifically Christian aspects to bear on the individual. The comments of Origen on the Mamre passage seem to conform to the characteristics of the former system.

²Page 243.

³Page 243.

⁴Page 245. Quasten II, 42, calls it "dangerously subjective."

⁵Page 248.

Philo used;¹ even the material which was traditionally seen as typological of Christ was often reduced to "a timeless analysis of good and evil impulses warring within the Christian's soul."²

Origen's Approach to the Literal
Sense of Scripture

We come now to the most important aspect of Origen's thought system and the one which separates him most decisively from our own time. Origen chooses in each case whether or not to concede a literal, historical sense to the biblical passage.³ One reason for his belief that historicity could be questioned in an individual case was his theory (presumably based on Philonic material) that there were divinely inspired deliberate inconsistencies in the Bible, which were intended to clue the reader that allegory was needed to understand the passage.⁴

Let us now look at Origen's exegesis of the visit at Mamre.⁵

¹Page 242.

²Page 252.

³Hanson lists some of these cases on pp. 238-241 and 265-266. Two other interesting O.T. examples would be his denial of David's complicity in the death of Uriah (262) and his spiritualizing of Abraham's dealings with Abimilech and Sarah (279).

⁴Page 264. Origen likened such passages to conditions, stumbling blocks, obstacles, etc. (265).

⁵Note that throughout the writings collected here Origen refers to the visitors as angels or as men. He feels

In In Cant. Cantic. 2¹ we learn that Abraham was granted great wisdom by God, who came to him often to teach him. Thus the references in the opening lines of the Mamre story are allegorical. Noontime signifies the high level of virtue which Abraham had. Mamre means a place of visions; Abraham sits because he has the time and inner peace for such visions. "At the door" means "outside," i.e., Abraham's mind was outside his body, far from bodily considerations or desires.

The principal example of Origen's work on Mamre is found in his Genesis Homily 4.² We will summarize here, with paragraph numbers on the left margin.

Par. 1 Origen begins his comments by contrasting Abraham's experience at Mamre with the visitation given to Lot in Gen. 19. Three men came to Abraham and they stood super eum; only two came to Lot and they delayed in platea. Lot is very inferior to Abraham; he had parted from Abraham (Gen. 13) and he had chosen to live in Sodom. Abraham's three visitors came at midday; Lot's two came in the evening. Abraham could stand the full glory of the light; Lot could not. Abraham received

free to use either term, since Scripture often does the same (so Comm. in Joannem 2, 23, citing Gen. 18 and 19; see G.C.S. 10, p. 79).

¹Latin by Rufinus. See G.C.S. 33, p. 139.

²All the Genesis Homilies are in Latin, by Rufinus. See G.C.S. 29, pp. 50-54 for this Homily 4.

the Lord and two angels--the Saviour and two destroyers; Lot only received the two destroyers.¹

Who made the greater show (apparatus) of hospitality? Abraham exhibited alacrity in his courtesies; he ran to the men, hurried to the tent, and bade Sarah to hurry. The cakes which Sarah made from fine flour are called subcinericias² (ἐγκρυφίας) and signify secret or hidden or spiritual bread.³ Lot does not use such fine flour, nor does he make three measures, nor does he make the spiritual breads.⁴

Abraham chose a good and tender calf, not simply taking the first calf he came across. Everyone moved with speed, even the servant boy. No one is lazy in the house of a wise man.

¹In Genesis Homily 6, 1, Origen briefly mentions the Mamre visit of the three men, and that Lot was spared destruction either by merit of his own hospitality or of his relationship to Abraham. In Selecta in Genesim, on Gen. 19, 1 (P.G. 12) Origen notes that perhaps Lot sat at the city gates of Sodom to watch for travellers, as Abraham also did. Lot could have been alert for strangers since he knew how badly his fellow citizens treated such people. Origen also notes that, in Gen. 19, 3, Lot had to persuade the visitors to enter his house, whereas Abraham had not needed such persuasiveness.

²Sic. Some manuscripts have subcinericios.

³Comm. in Matt. 15, 33 (G.C.S. 40, p. 448) also mentions the serving of the bread and meat, but there the context is a five-ages-of-man theme.

⁴In Leviticus Homily 13, 3 (G.C.S. 29, p. 472), Latin by Rufinus, Origen notes that Abraham's ἐγκρυφίας were made of fine flour and signify hidden and deep revelations. Lot made his ordinary bread from ordinary flour, even though he was not a poor man. This difference between Abraham and Lot signifies Abraham's greater virtue and greater rewards.

Par. 2 The men appear "above" Abraham because he had indeed submitted himself to God's will. Abraham gave three measures of baked goods to the three men; Origen observes that everything Abraham did was "spiritual" and full of mystery (sacramentis)--an apparent allusion to the Trinity.¹ A calf was served--another mystery (sacramentum). How tender and good was he who humiliated himself for us even unto death, and who gave up his life for his friends. This is the fatted calf, killed by the father of the prodigal son; this is the only son offered by God who so loved the world.

Abraham knew that his guests were not ordinary men (Gen. 18, 2-3; he adored one and spoke to one), yet he had water brought for footwashing. This was not only thorough hospitality on his part (which we should imitate) but also a sign about Jesus' remarks, in Mark 6, 11 and Matt. 10, 14-15, about shaking the dust off the feet. Abraham wanted no dust left to be a "testimony of unbelief" against himself on Judgment day.²

¹In Cant. Cantic. 2 (G.C.S. 33, p. 158), Latin by Rufinus, Origen says that at Mamre the angels represented something greater than themselves, in their service. There the mystery (mysterium) of the Trinity was brought to the surface.

²It is remotely possible that Origen also intended to allude to the Mandatum here, in that he refers to the Dominica sacramenta; in Comm. in Joannem 32, 4 (G.C.S. 10, pp. 431-432), when noting that Jesus did the actual washing at the Mandatum, Origen briefly mentions that at Mamre Abraham had had this chore done by servants.

Par. 3 Origen notes that Abraham served the Lord¹ and the angels "under the tree," the tree of Mamre. There must be an allegory here.² Mamre means visio or perspicacia; the Lord was delighted with the vision and sensitivity of Abraham, who was clean of heart. In such a heart the Lord and his angels can have a true feast.³

¹Origen elsewhere notes the presence of Christ at Mamre. In Hom. Matt. 1, 6 (G.C.S. 41, p. 245), on Matt. 1, 18-25, the theme is "They shall call Him Emmanuel." Christ has dealt with men before, not only in figures and images, but also in face to face encounters.

"By Abraham, the father of believers, He was seen at the third hour of the day although not in the ineffable substance of His divinity, but rather in an angelic image (per angelicum speciem) at midday."

²Hanson, p. 220, notes Origen's impatience with (or lack of interest in) the literal sense of this verse.

"It is not to be believed that it was the Holy Spirit's highest purpose to mention, in the Pentateuch, where Abraham stood. I have come to hear what the Holy Spirit wants to teach mankind; how does it help me when I hear that Abraham stood under a tree?"

³Origen usually allegorizes the eating of the meal. In his Treatise on Prayer 27, 11 (G.C.S. 3, p. 370) he explains,

"For sometimes the saints are able to share mental and logical food not only with men but also with more heavenly powers, either as to help the powers or to show them that they have been able to procure nutrients for themselves; rejoicing and feeding on such a proof the angels have also become more ready to cooperate in every way, and for the future to co-understand the fuller truths and to co-grasp the better truths with him who earlier had enjoyed nourishing lessons and who has made the angels rejoice and, if I may say so, has nourished them."

Culton, in Alexandrian Christianity (p. 198), notes this passage as one of the relatively few allegories in the Treatise. He also points out (p. 368, notes to his translation) that this allegory, in context, praises human good will;

Par. 4 Abraham and the visitors were overheard by Sarah, who was standing behind the tent door "post Abraham."¹ We should learn from the example of the wives of the patriarchs that women should follow their husbands--follow them "to the Lord." Our manly senses and intelligence lead us to God; our womanly aspects are carnal.²

There is another meaning to Sarah following Abraham. At the Exodus God, in the column of smoke by day and in the column of fire by night, preceded and the people of the Lord followed behind.³

Abraham and Sarah were old, not in the sense of age

men can truly please God, according to their abilities.

Jay's translation (Eric. G. Jay, Origen's Treatise on Prayer, London, 1954) of this difficult passage has better explanatory notes than O'Meara's translation (John J. O'Meara, A.C.W. series, v. 19, Origen: Prayer, Newman, 1954).

In Comm. in Joannem 13, 33 (on John 4, 32, "I have food to eat of which you do not know,"), Origen allegorizes food to mean virtue. Angels who "feed" on virtue can never get enough of it. That is why Abraham was able to feed his visitors at Mamre, because they can never have fullness in this regard.

¹A legitimate Vetus variant reading.

²In Genesis Homily 6, 1 (G.C.S. 29, p. 66), Abraham represents sapientia, and Sarah represents animi virtus. In Genesis Homily 8, 10 (G.C.S. 29, p. 85) we are told that we too might spiritually generate an Isaac. We would have to cast out all effeminate inclinations from our souls and so bear a "son" (joy, gladness) by the husband (virtue and wisdom).

³Despite the first impression, this remark does not seem to be like a Rabbinic "merit" parallel.

but in the sense of maturity and virtue;¹ before them no one, no matter how old, had ever been called a presbyter with regard to his age.²

Conclusions

Many of Origen's allegories are clear imitations of Philonic material--the idea that Abraham was taught by God; that Mamre signified a place of vision; that Abraham's seated posture signified his inner tranquillity; that his mind "watched" his body. The "hidden secrets" theme, based on the "hidden" breads, shows Origen using the additional LXX Greek semantic meaning just as Philo did. Other imitations include the dictum that no one is lazy in the house of a wise man; that manly and womanly attributes compete within our souls; that the patriarch, his wife, and their son represent wisdom,

¹In Selecta in Genesim, on Gen. 18, 11 (P.G. 12) Origen speculates that the phrase "advanced in days" is used only of the just; if this is so then no evil person truly "advances."

In Comm. on Romans 4, 6 (Rufinus, P.G. 14, cols. 983-984, on Rom. 4, 1 ff.) it is said of Abraham that luxury did not excite him, nor was he disturbed by passion; the passions of women were not in Sarah, nor the frenzy of incontinence. Sarah and Abraham were not being drawn unwillingly into the old marital habits.

In his Treatise on Prayer 2, 1 (G.C.S. 3, p. 298) Origen praises Tatiana as being like Sarah in that her "way" had ceased. Context does not indicate whether Tatiana is past child bearing age or has taken a vow of virginity. Oulton (Alexandrian Christianity, p. 331) opts for agedness as the explanation.

²Genesis Homily 3, 3 (G.C.S. 29, p. 42) has a brief reference to this same matter of the title presbyter not being used for anyone before Abraham and Sarah.

virtue, and joy, respectively. The attempts to allegorize the eating of the meal are also imitative of Philo. The overall thrust of Philo's exegesis, as seen in his statement¹ that the whole miracle of the coming of the three visitors had as its purpose to assure Abraham that the Father had not failed to notice that he was a wise man, is substantially the same as Origen's. His statement² was that the Lord was delighted with the vision and sensitivity of Abraham, who was clean of heart, and that within such a heart the Lord and His angels can have a true feast.

There are, of course, some peculiarly Christian interpretations in Origen. Twice he sees in the number three a type of the Trinity, although these are brief. The pre-Incarnate Christ is assumed to be one of the visitors, as is needed in Origen's theory of salvation history. In other instances the calf signifies Christ, as Origen fuses together active and passive images of Jesus as the willing calf and the calf offered by the Father.

Origen's view of the unity of the two Testaments is well shown in his remarks about the footwashing. While he may allude to the Mandatum (and briefly does so in Comm. in Joannem 32, 4), his comments in Genesis Homily 4 concern Mark 6, 11 and Matt. 1, 14-15. Origen explains that Abraham wanted

¹De Abraham 118.

²Genesis Homily 4, 3.

to anticipate (*praevenire*) and wash their feet so that there might not be any dust left to be shaken at him on Judgment day, as a testimony of his unbelief. This is indeed a complicated type. Abraham, by washing their feet and so not leaving any dust for his visitors to shake against him (as the disciples of Jesus are to shake off the dust from their feet against those who will not accept their message), stands for those who will accept the message of Christ someday from His disciples--but Abraham's visitors are the pre-Incarnate Christ and two angels! To put it another way, what was there for Abraham to not believe or not accept? What relationship is really there between the two passages, Gen. 18 and Mark 6, 11? For Origen the relationship may be strictly a verbal one.

In the early sections of Genesis Homily 4 several legitimate contrasts are drawn between Abraham and Lot. As far as I can tell from a quick survey, Philo does not concern himself with the same contrasts, although we did find some of these contrasts occasionally mentioned in the Rabbinic materials. Perhaps the clue to Origen's thinking lies in the Leviticus Homily 13, 3. Here Origen sees Abraham and Lot as representative of those who know of religious mysteries and of those who only know the common rules for salvation, respectively. There is no indication here, or in the other places where Lot is mentioned, that one can work oneself up to the higher class of men.

While Origen does recall the Mandatum scene once, his

references to the calf as a symbol of Christ, to the footwashing as a reminder of Mark 6, 11, and to the Trinity can at best be called "sermon illustration" types. The contrasting of Abraham and Lot can be seen as an example of ecclesial sermon illustration typology.

C. Later Eastern Writers

Before coming to the Antiochean school, I will mention briefly ten Eastern writers later than Origen. These ten usually repeat points we have already seen. Many of them focus on the question of the pre-Incarnate Christ or the Trinity at Mamre, or use the matter of the consumption of the food in various theological arguments. By the early part of the sixth century we find Catenae of biblical knowledge being produced by Procopius of Gaza.

1. Eusebius of Caesarea (writing 303-312), in his Church History 1, 2, 7-8,¹ explains that Jesus had to be present at Mamre, since God the Father cannot be limited to a physical space or to a human form. Briefer remarks to the effect that Christ appeared at Mamre can be found in Church History 1, 4, 6-8,² and Life of Constantine 3, 53.³

2. Athanasius (writing 358-359) also holds that Jesus

¹G.C.S. 9.1, p. 14.

²G.C.S. 9.1, p. 40.

³G.C.S. 7, p. 101.

was the divine visitor at Mamre and other occasions in the Old Testament.¹

3. Cyril of Jerusalem (writing c. 350) also briefly mentions that Abraham received Jesus at Mamre.² Context indicates that Cyril is explaining the reasonableness of the Incarnation of Jesus, in that He had already come often to men in a pre-Incarnate mode. Cyril accepts the fact that Jesus ate the food at Mamre, since he mentions that later the Incarnate Jesus also ate with his fellow men.

4. Gregory Nazienzen (writing 369-374) speaks of the patriarchs who recognized God in a theophany or great work. Abraham received a man and gave him food; then he realized who his visitor was, and revered him.³

5. Cyril of Alexandria (writing 433-441) in Contra Julianum 1, 20⁴ sees the visit of three figures to Abraham as a type of the Trinity.

¹Thus he records the appropriate Council of Sirmium decree in De Synodis 27, 15 (P.G. 26, col. 737); he argues against an adoptionist Christology by seeing Christ in the O.T. in Contra Arianos 1, 38; 2, 13; and 3, 14 (P.G. 26, cols. 92, 173, and 352, respectively).

²Catechesis 12, 16 (P.G. 33, col. 744).

³De Theol. 28, 2, 18 (P.G. 36, col. 49). Quasten III, 242, outlines the content of the five Theological Orations. It would seem that in Oration 28 he is speaking of God without specifying that the Second Person is the focus.

Gregory compares his sister Gorgonia's devotion to her husband to that of Sarah in Discourse 8 (P.G. 35, col. 793).

⁴P.G. 76, cols. 532-533.

6. Eutharius of Tyana (writing c. 431), an ally of Cyril's enemy Nestorius, denies that the angels really ate the food which they were served.¹ His concern was to point out that the visitors were angels and not men; context indicates that his main aim in this section was to discuss the human nature of Jesus, who truly needed food when He lived among men after His Incarnation.

7. Hesychius of Jerusalem (writing 430-450) notes that simila is the word used in Gen. 18, 6, and in Lev. 2, 1, while farina is used in Matthew 13, 33.² The Matthew citation, the parable about hiding yeast in three measures of flour, must certainly indicate the Trinity. In the O.T., the word simila, as when Sarah is told to make three loaves of bread from simila, can serve at least as a partially effective indicator of the same mystery of the Trinity. This allegory seems to be new with Hesychius, who was a follower of the Alexandrian school of exegesis.

8. Baradotus (writing c. 451) relates the three measures of flour which Sarah must use to the image in Luke 13, 21. Thus the Mamre story is a foreshadowing of Christ's life on earth.³

¹Confutatio 13 (P.G. 28, cols. 1377-1380).

²Commentary on Leviticus 1, 2 (P.G. 93, col. 805).

³This is found in Letter 21 from Baradotus, an Eastern ascetic, to Emperor Leo at Constantinople; Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum 2.5, E. Schwartz, ed. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1927-1971), p. 37.

9. Procopius of Gaza (d. 520) was the first to assemble catenae of patristic comments into verse by verse commentaries on some of the books of the Bible. The following summary is subdivided according to the Migne column numbers.¹

364 He begins by discussing the identity of the visitors.

Some say that the three men are angels; some, following Jewish patterns, say that one of the three is God and the other two are angels; some say that it is a type of the holy and consubstantial Trinity.

Procopius maintains that however God chose to come, He moderated the mode of appearance to our human limitations.²

365 Mamre means "from vision"; the participants were worthy of the vision. The bow Abraham made was as to a close friend; it was not an act of worship. Abraham rushes about like a young man. The angels were above him (i.e., not on the ground); this indicates that their status was above that of men. In the house of a good man everyone works quickly. Abraham served but did not eat with them, out of respect. He acted as host not in the traditional sense of fellow diner, but rather as a servant.

368 Abraham was modest; his hospitality was cheerful, eager, and generous. Sarah's laughter seems to be an innocent reaction to the thought of her own age as well as Abraham's condition. God questioned her to deepen her faith, so that

¹Genesis, P.G. 87A, cols. 363-368.

²In his commentary on Isaia 6, 1-5 (P.G. 87.2, col. 1929), Procopius implies that Jesus alone was seen at Mamre.

the birth of the son who was promised might be all that greater a miracle. Abraham's escorting is an integral part of his hosting duties.

I think that Procopius' evaluation of the Mamre account focuses often on factual details.

10. Maximus the Confessor (d. 662) offers a Trinitarian explanation of the Mamre theophany in Quaestiones ad Thalassium 28,¹ and in his Letter on Charity 2, 223.²

D. Antiochean Hermeneutics

1. John Chrysostom

We are fortunate to have a great deal of material on the Mamre passage in the writings of John Chrysostom, a leading member of the Antiochean school of exegesis.³

¹P.G. 90, cols. 360-361.

²P.G. 91, col. 400.

³The life and writings of Chrysostom are treated by P. W. Harkins in N.C.E., "St. John Chrysostom," and more extensively in Quasten III, pp. 424-482. Walter J. Burghardt's article "On Early Christian Exegesis" (Theological Studies 11 [1950] pp. 78-116) contains an analysis of J. Guillet's article "Les Exégèses d'Alexandrie et d'Antioch. Conflit ou Malentendue?" (pp. 257-302 of vol. 34 [1947] Recherches de Science Religieuse). Both Burghardt and Guillet are concerned with specifying the sound insights of both schools and with revealing the elements which they actually had in common.

A most helpful book for someone who wishes to set Chrysostom's handling of a specific passage in proper perspective is Frederick H. Chase's Chrysostom, A Study in the History of Biblical Interpretation, London, 1887. A recent article which echoes some of Chase's conclusions is "Relativité et Transcendance du Texte Biblique d'après Jean Chrysostome" by Jean-M. Leroux, pp. 67-78, La Bible et les Pères: Colloque de

The development of another approach to exegesis, represented by certain Christians of Antioch, can be traced to Origen's own scholarly example. His interest in grammar and textual exactness influenced Lucian of Antioch and Pamphilus of Caesarea.¹ Later members of the school continued to be interested in literal, non-allegorical interpretations, although they did not advance textual study as much as they might have.

Chrysostom himself was, as Chase notes,² a "scholarly pastor" more than an "accurate, conscientious commentator." Despite the extensive pastoral and polemical challenges to him, Chrysostom did not marshal Scriptures as proof texts in his main works; he preferred instead to write continuous biblical commentaries. Chase speaks favorably of his priorities.

Chrysostom was the founder of no school of theologians. No critic can trace to his teaching or influence any shadow darkening the page of later theology. No General Council has anathematised him. No controversy is specially connected with his name. No bigots have ever claimed him as

Strasbourg (Paris: Presses Universitaires, 1971).

Another helpful work is C. Baur's John Chrysostom and His Time, 2 vols. (Newman, 1959). In Vol. 1 Baur has a chapter on Chrysostom as a pulpit orator (pp. 206-230) and another on his exegetical skills (pp. 315-329). In this latter section some study is made of his distribution of Old Testament citations (p. 316); Genesis is second only to the Psalms as a source for quotation. Most interesting are Chrysostom's views on the need for the frequent private reading of Scripture (pp. 322-326).

¹Chase, pp. 3-4. The first chapter of his book (pp. 1-27) gives a brief history of the development of the Antiochian school, including Syrian influences.

²Page 14.

their own. Speaking generally, there is a breadth about his Biblical work, the freedom of one who was not pledged to support a favourite doctrine from every passage or every book.¹

After Chrysostom, the Antiochean school lost much of its momentum. Chase² follows its traces through the influence of Chrysostom and Theodoret upon later generations; through Greek writers such as John Damascene, Photius, Oecumenius, and Theophylact;³ through the Syrian schools of Edessa and Nisibis; and through individual Western Fathers.

We should get some idea of how John dealt with the whole range of the Bible, rather than just confine ourselves to these two Genesis passages.⁴

Given the tradition of Christianity up to his time, and the pressure of many heresies such as the Marcionites, Arians, and Manicheans, Chrysostom firmly believes in the unity of Scripture; the Old and New Testaments speak of the same God and of the same Jesus. This unity, however, is not a uniformity; the reading of the New Testament is not veiled,

¹Page 18.

²Pages 23-27.

³The first two of these writers fall within our time frame but I was not able to investigate their work due to lack of Scriptural indices. In the future, perhaps the Biblia Patristica or other Patristic reference services will give us more Greek Christian Scriptural indices to work with.

⁴Chase examines his use of the O.T. on pp. 28-78.

as was that of the Old. The old law was a tutor, preparing us for Jesus.¹

Chrysostom had two principles which applied to both Testaments. The first is that all Scripture exists because of God's condescension (συγκατάβασις). The second is that the Scriptures are minutely accurate.

The first of these principles means that Revelation came gradually during the development of the Bible,² and was

¹Chase, pp. 40-41.

²Leroux notes several passages from Chrysostom's works which clearly imply that he considered the Scriptures to be not only the result of a gradual revelation, but even more the imperfect result. Leroux develops an image used by Chrysostom and refers to the Scriptures as a set of correspondence from God to men (75, 76). This correspondence is a tangible support (77) for the average Christian. Leroux then concludes L'Ecriture n'est donc pas parfaite en soi. Elle n'est même pas le moyen idéal de communication entre Dieu et l'homme. D'une certaine manière, et Chrysostome l'affirme explicitement, elle est un pis-aller, le moyen imaginé par Dieu pour rééduquer l'humanité. Comme tout moyen pédagogique, elle dépend de son objet autant que de ses origines. Elle ne transmet donc pas une image parfaite de la vérité et de la sagesse, mais simplement la meilleure expression possible de cette vérité et de cette sagesse, selon le degré de maturité réalisé par la communauté humaine. Nous touchons là un aspect fondamental de l'exégèse de Chrysostome: s'il admet en effet que l'Ecriture considérée en son ensemble, représente la somme de vérité et de sagesse susceptible d'être assimilée par la raison humaine, il affirme avec autant de netteté que l'un quelconque des textes de l'Ecriture, pris isolément, ne contient, même en ce que concerne la thème qu'il développe, que la seule partie de vérité ou de sagesse nécessaire dans le contexte pédagogique de la révélation. Ce principe d'une extrême importance se résume dans la notion de sugkatabasis qui constitue la clef de voûte du système exégétique de Chrysostome, car elle exprime la disponibilité bienveillante de Dieu, qui soumet sans aucune restriction la révélation aux contingences de l'histoire humaine; en

conditioned by the powers of those to whom it was given.¹ Thus we must understand that anthropomorphic expressions are legitimate attempts to convey attributes and intentions of God. We cannot allow ourselves to be led astray by such expressions into excesses of allegorism or literalism. Further, a particular passage in Scripture may have been given in order to correct previous human weaknesses and we may have in our possession a passage from later still which corrects the previous correction.²

Secondly, we must not confuse this gradual revelation, this conditioned series of revelations, with inexactness of language. The minute details and wordings of Scripture have a plain meaning which should not be put aside.³ Nor should the actual texts of Scripture be diminished or expanded in any way.

In sum, those books of the Bible which relate history are meant to expose us to God's gradual revelation, His grad-

effet, cette soumission ne se révèle pas seulement par le caractère progressif de la révélation, mais encore par l'acception des imprécisions et des imperfections imputables aux vicissitudes de la transmission des textes révélés ou plus simplement aux limites des auteurs sacrés. (77-78)

This confident attitude on the part of Chrysostom contrasts with Origen's conviction that every verbal detail was directly inspired by God. Consequently, we should find Chrysostom treating passages in a less "oracular" manner.

¹Chase, p. 42.

²Chase, p. 46.

³Page 48.

ual and growing moral education of all men. Unlike secular history, which may have no morally educative purpose, biblical history has a moral aim. Chase summarizes,

Here the ruling aim is not literary or artistic, but moral and spiritual. Thus two principles are involved. In the Bible we have real history. Again, there is that in it which makes it yield to the touch of the seeker after spiritual wisdom. But here we reach a principle of interpretation which became the distinguishing mark of the School of Antioch. If the histories of the Bible are not fictions or fairy tales, their genuine historical character must be honestly recognised, or their spiritual significance will surely be missed or marred. This superstructure of doctrine must be built on the rock of historical interpretation; otherwise the floods of heresy and the shifting winds of theological fashion will overwhelm it. And because it will drag down with it, to be buried at least for a time, some of the true and solid treasures of Christianity, its fall will be great.¹

Let us now look at the specific use Chrysostom made of the Mamre account, in many works from his years as a preacher in Antioch, and in a few works from his later years at Constantinople.²

¹Pages 50-51. Given this profile of the Antiochean appreciation of biblical history and Chrysostom's own principles, we might expect literal exegetical results from Chrysostom as he comments on the Pentateuch and the historical books. However, in the actual examples given by Chase (51-61) we find that Chrysostom's desire to find moral applications can just as easily limit some of his literal interpretations as did the Alexandrians' use of allegory limit theirs. Also, the Antiocheans allowed for types of Christ in the O.T., even if they had stricter norms for using them. In this matter of finding types of Jesus, Chrysostom's methods of interpreting prophetic and wisdom materials (62-78) could not be considered literal either.

²Chrysostom died in 407 A.D.

A) Hospitality and Charity

The longest single passage of Chrysostom's on Gen. 18 can be found in Homily 41 in Genesim.¹ In the brief outline of the homily given here, the Migne column-numbers will be on the left. The opening sections of the homily deal with the Gospel parable of the servants who invest five, two and one talents; one type of spiritual "investing" we could do would be to be hospitable.

378 God appeared to Abraham at Mamre because he had obeyed His wishes in the matter of circumcision.² Abraham was very eager to have guests; he himself sat outdoors to watch for visitors. He did not take a nap or relegate this duty to a servant or otherwise excuse himself from this task. Noon would be a good time to find travellers.

When the three first came, Abraham did not know who they were and, while being attentive to their needs, he was not overly inquisitive. Thus, because of his hospitality, the Lord God of all, and His angels, visited him.

379 Abraham himself ran to greet them.

380 Abraham acts almost as if a young man, so motivated is he by diligence. His bowing to the ground is a hospitable act (not one of worship); he does not want to seem to be acting merely because custom prescribed it. The entreaty "If I

¹P.G. 53, cols. 374 ff.

²This is a rare positive reference to circumcision and the context of Gen. Ch. 17 by a Christian Father.

have found favor in your eyes . . ." makes the guest feel like the master; it is as if Abraham had said, "You, oh guest, are giving the favor, not receiving it." Perhaps one of the visitors seemed to be the chief but, even if this were the case, Abraham did not recognize him as divine.

381 When Abraham tells Sarah to rush, he is not being critical of her usual pace.¹

382 Since there were three visitors, he had three separate measures of flour prepared, in order that the bread would be finished that much faster. Abraham and the boy rush to dress the calf. Abraham's joy and eagerness actually invigorated his body. He was not in any way condescending to his guests.

383 Abraham, standing under the tree waiting on them, is the very model of a host.

When the men ask for Sarah by name, this is Abraham's first clue that his visitors are not ordinary men. The mention of the age of Abraham and Sarah in v. 11 helps us to excuse her subsequent laughter.

384 Abraham, in v. 15, said to Sarah, "No, you did laugh." Abraham said this to hush Sarah and so keep her from compounding an already tense situation. It was also his duty as a host to help in ways such as this. Indeed, true hospitality is

not the needing of a vast array of courses, nor a costly display, but rather a cheerful atmosphere. Not

¹Chrysostom digresses to criticize the wearing of too much jewelry by women.

a service rendered with some words but rather with love from the heart, and noble thoughts.

Another instance of Chrysostom's understanding of the Mamre account is his Homily 23 Περὶ Ἐλεημοσύνης καὶ Φιλοξενίας,¹ which we will summarize briefly here.

When we speak of hospitality we are really considering not wealth, but willingness. Abraham was a rich man but that is incidental to his hospitality. The Lord and three men appeared to him; he arose and bowed, not realizing that God was present. Abraham had been "spreading the net" of hospitality by himself and not through his servants. If he had known that God was there, naturally he would have been generous. His not knowing better demonstrates just how genuinely kind and hospitable he was.

Sarah also shared in the work herself. She "snapped at commands." In doing all this, Abraham increased his understanding of philosophy. Even the calf was made lighter by his understanding and willingness. Isaac would be the reward which Abraham and Sarah would receive for all this.²

In Homily 45 on Acts 20, 32³ the context is the greater value of private charity over public church almsgiving. The following is a summary.

¹P.G. 63, cols. 715-718.

²There is also a clear mention of Abraham and Isaac's hospitality in Homily 21 on Ephesians (P.G. 62, cols. 153-154). Offhand, I do not know what biblical or non-biblical tradition about Isaac Chrysostom had in mind.

³P.G. 60, cols. 318-320.

Let us help the poor as Abraham did; he did not know that he was hosting Christ and angels. To the travellers he showed liberality as regards food, eagerness in personally working, and modesty in greeting them and asking them to stay. We too should also have eagerness, joy, and liberality when we help someone. The soul of a stranger blushes and is ashamed, and, unless one shows an excess of joy as Abraham did, the stranger will depart feeling disregarded. Therefore, come to the church door; do something extra; take home a poor person or at least give him an alms. Beat the church; beat us out in generosity.

The above excerpt from the homily on Acts shows a shift which is new to us with Chrysostom--Abraham's hospitality has now become Abraham's almsgiving or charity.¹ Let us

¹Quasten III, p. 454, notes

"Chrysostom's keen sense of social justice was shocked by the violent contrasts of wealth and poverty in both Antioch and Constantinople. He estimates the number of poor in Constantinople at about 50,000 and the Christian population at 100,000. While he constantly upbraids the rich for their selfish indifference to the fate of their less fortunate brethren, he never forgets to insist on the duty of almsgiving. This topic returns so often in his sermons that he has been called 'St. John the Almsgiver.'"

Baur's biography is helpful here. In vol. 1, pp. 29-44, he sketches a brief picture of social conditions in Antioch in Chrysostom's day. In vol. 2, pp. 21-28 and 56-71, we learn of contemporary life in Constantinople and of Chrysostom's initial social reforms after becoming bishop. On vol. 1, p. 217, Baur reminds us of the extensive number of Chrysostom's extant homilies on almsgiving, poverty, avarice, and the improper use of wealth.

For an extensive survey of Byzantine public assistance up the twelfth century, see Demetrios Constantelos' Byzan-

look at three aspects of the Mamre story which Chrysostom considers to exemplify standards of proper almsgiving.

1. Abraham used his wealth to aid the poor

In Homily 34 on First Corinthians¹ the topic is the proper use of material wealth. John distinguishes "self-made" rich people and those so endowed by God; Abraham was one of the latter. He gave all he had to strangers and the poor. To the three visitors he offered much food and personal care. He was a "harbor" for strangers and those in need. Abraham acted as if he possessed nothing exclusively for himself.

In Ad Populum Antioch, 2, 5,² we hear of the truly rich--those who give to others. Abraham was rich but not fond of money. He searched for travellers; he used a mobile tent rather than a house. This tent was deemed worthy of a visit by angels, who seek not beauty of dwelling but virtue of soul;

tine Philanthropy and Social Welfare (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1968). The author traces the use of the word "philanthropia" from ancient Greek sources. The twofold content of the term has to do with divine love for men and also with human love for mankind. This second aspect was invoked by Philo in De Abraham 107, mentioned earlier in this chapter.

Greek Christians inherited the concept but were more energetic in their practical philanthropy to the poor, the elderly, the blind, and the sick. At several points (pp. 24, 68, 71, 155f, 186, 208, 257-259) the author mentions Chrysostom's writings and personal involvement with hospitals, hospices, poorhouses, and the like. The last reference goes into greater detail on how the figure of 50,000 poor in Constantinople is derived from his sermons.

¹P.G. 61, cols. 294-295.

²P.G. 49, cols. 40-41.

to express it another way, they seek not only simplicity of dwelling but richness of soul.¹

2. Abraham and Sarah were Personally Involved

In Homily 21 on Romans 12, 13² John speaks of how we should seek chances to help others. Abraham looked for guests as if they were "prey"; we knit the brow and try to avoid such encounters. Abraham set a table for his guests because he was full of an ingrained disposition to be hospitable.

Homily 35 on First Corinth.³ mentions Abraham's humility and personal involvement. He was humble; he took in the travellers. He was not conceited; he ran, bowed, called them lords, presented Sarah in the role of a servingmaid.

In Homily 14 on Timothy⁴ we see that Abraham and Sarah were involved personally at Mamre, and not just financially.

¹Abraham's commendable attitude toward material riches is mentioned briefly in Homily 10 on First Thess. (P.G. 62, col. 459), and in Propheticum Dictum Illud (Isaia 45, 7) 4, (P.G. 56, col. 147).

In a few places Chrysostom compares Abraham's generosity with that of the widow who fed Elijah. In Homily 19 on Second Corinth. (P.G. 61, col. 535) we are reminded that the widow did not have a herd of cattle, but she took from the handful which was all she had. In On Sts. Peter and Helia (P.G. 50, col. 732) we recall that Abraham was wealthy, while the widow gave from her hunger. In Pseudo-Chrys. Homily 50 on I Kings 17, 13 (P.G. 59, cols. 489-490; same sermon also appears in P.L. 95, col. 1514, attributed to Paul the Deacon, an 8th century writer) the request of Elijah that the widow hasten to make the bread is compared to the hastening of Abraham and Sarah.

²P.G. 60, col. 606.

³P.G. 61, cols. 302-303.

⁴P.G. 62, cols. 573-574.

So too we should pitch in ourselves, since the personal touch is needed to make guests feel at ease; "we have to show in words and deeds that the doer is not doing good but receiving it, and is being shown kindness more than he is showing kindness as host."

Homily 35 on Matt. 10, 34¹ notes that if one donates money to charity he only gets one reward; if he does the work himself, he gets an extra real return. Thus Abraham got his own calf, ignoring his 318 servants.

3. Abraham was not Overly Inquisitive

In his De Lazaro concio 2, 5² the question is asked why the Lazarus of the Gospel parable went to "Abraham's bosom" when he died.³ The answer is that Abraham is a rebuke to the rich man's inhospitality. Abraham had received "men," whom he did not know were angels; he thought they were human travellers and no more. So also we earn more grace when we take in the common, abject, and truly poor. Like Abraham, we should not be overly curious about the identities of guests or their itineraries.

B Further Remarks Concerning Sarah

In the following citations from Chrysostom we shall

¹P.G. 57, col. 412.

²P.G. 48, cols. 988-990.

³Lazarus and Abraham are linked also in De Lazaro, concio 6, 5 (P.G. 48, col. 1039) and Second Letter to Olympias (#17) (S.C. 13, p. 210).

concentrate on new remarks concerning Sarah. In On Psalm 48, 17 (English Ps. 49, 16)¹ the visit at Mamre is recounted at length, along the lines of Homily 41 in Genesim. In col. 509 Sarah is depicted as keeping her modesty even though she helps to serve the visitors outdoors

. . . using a tree instead of a chamber; having the shade of the leaves for a chamber, she was not ashamed to be seen in public. Sarah stood, displaying the proper domestic attributes, and earning the reward for service.²

In Homily 23 on Hebrews 11, 11³ Sarah's laughter is briefly mentioned. Her laughter was prompted by a lack of faith, but the ensuing fear was motivated by faith. In Homily 6 on Matthew 2, 1,⁴ Sarah's laughter in Gen. 18 is said to have been blameworthy.

In Homily 20 on Ephesians 5, 31⁵ in a discussion on "spiritual" marriages, Sarah's lack of monthly periods is considered praiseworthy. Further,⁶ we find approval of her submission to Abraham (she called him "lord" in Gen. 18,12), and praise for the domestic harmony in all of Abraham's household.

¹P.G. 55, cols. 505-510.

²Sarah's service is also mentioned in some detail in Homily 30 on Romans (P.G. 60, col. 666).

³P.G. 63, cols. 379-380. Latin by Mutianus.

⁴P.G. 57, col. 69.

⁵P.G. 62, col. 141.

⁶Col. 143.

In On Galatians 4, 20 ff.,¹ and Homily 16 on Romans 9, 9² Sarah is taken as a type of the Christian Church. The analogy drawn from the Mamre account emphasizes the life-giving power of God's promise (Gen. 18, 14) and ignores Abraham's physical cooperation in the conception of Isaac.

C Further Remarks Concerning the Identity of the Visitors

Chrysostom does not generally concern himself with lengthy speculation on the exact mode of theophanic visitation at Mamre.³ In most of the citations which we have seen so far the angel visitors receive more attention than God the Father or Jesus. The most specific reference to Christ appearing at Mamre is in Contra Theatra 3,⁴ summarized here.

The tent was open to all; it was situated on a main road and not in some remote place. Christ and two angels appeared to Abraham; he knew this with the eyes of faith even though all three visitors had strictly human forms. They ate with him on account of his hospitality. Sarah was his co-worker. The bread was unleavened so that it would bake faster. All the procedures were done as respectfully as if for religious rites. Then Abraham receives from the

¹P.G. 61, cols. 661-664.

²P.G. 60, cols. 553-554.

³Quasten's remarks about Chrysostom's "lack of inclination for systematic presentation" and about his Christology would fit with our findings here (III, pp. 474-476). The presence of a pre-Incarnate Christ in O.T. events need not imply that one has a subordinationist Christology, even if that is often the case.

⁴P.G. 56, cols. 545-546.

only begotten God news of Abraham's only begotten son, Isaac.¹

On the other hand, in Homily 42 in Genesim² we read that the angels and their Lord had come to Abraham at the same time;³ the angels then went on to Sodom but He remained behind and talked with Abraham⁴ about things to come. The "Lord" in this context seems to be God the Father.

Conclusions

The contrast between Chrysostom's use of the Mamre story and Alexandrian use of it could hardly be more striking. Chrysostom, convinced of the factual history of the event, employs no allegory at all in his exegesis. He makes no effort to find types of Christ in the footwashing or in the calf; he draws no Trinitarian types from the fact that three visitors are spoken of or that three measures of flour are baked. He has no trouble with the idea that the visitors ate the food provided.

On the other hand, his comparison of God's word of promise to Sarah in Gen. 18, 14 with God's later bringing

¹Quite brief allusions in Homily 33 on John (P.G. 59, col. 190), regarding the Samaritan woman at the well, and in Homily 9 on Ephesians (P.G. 62, col. 71) regarding Paul, also indicate that Chrysostom thought that it was Jesus who had appeared at Mamre.

²P.G. 54, cols. 385-389.

³Col. 387.

⁴Chrysostom for the moment ignores the escorting by Abraham.

forth of the Christian Church is a rather weak use of type, since it so patently ignores Abraham. Also, Chrysostom's inclination to see the travellers as poor men is not based on any internal biblical evidence, nor did we find any such inclination among the Rabbis. Further, Chrysostom seems to exhibit little interest in vv. 9 to 16 of the Mamre story. One would not get much of the religious force of v. 14 if one relied only on Chrysostom's comments. Chase speaks of Chrysostom sometimes being "too realistic";¹ perhaps that is why his interpretation of the story, for all its welcome literalness and pastoral intensity, might seem a bit pale.

Unlike most of the Fathers we have seen so far, Chrysostom does pay attention to the details of the Mamre passage. Thus he makes telling observations on Abraham's recent circumcision, his hospitality, his assumption that his visitors were human, and so on. The sum total of his commentary certainly constitutes an interpretational difference of import from the Alexandrian tradition. His evaluation of Abraham and Sarah as models of charity for our own imitation is entirely new and quite intense.

2. Theodoret

Theodoret (writing 450) was the last major writer of the Antiochean school.² His few remarks on the Mamre account deserve mention.

¹Chase, p. 192.

²See Quasten III, 536-554.

In his commentary on Daniel 10, 16-17¹ Theodoret notes that use of the word lord does not imply that the speaker is necessarily aware of his addressee as divine. Thus Abraham used the term in Gen. 18, 3, thinking them to be men only.

In Questions on Genesis 69² Theodoret admits that the text says that the men ate the food which Abraham gave them. However they were angels who have no bodies. Thus they seemed to be eating, but they were not putting the food in their mouths and stomachs; we should not wonder too much as to how they got rid of it.³

The visit at Mamre is briefly mentioned in his commentary on Hebrews 13, 2.⁴

E. Western Writers through Augustine

Western Christians developed no schools of interpretation as such, but tended to borrow and adapt Eastern methods. We have for the Mamre passage the writings of six Western Fathers for the period up to Augustine's death.

¹P.G. 81, col. 1500.

²P.G. 80, col. 117.

³Both Quasten (III, 539) and Chase (21) point out that Theodoret did allow for a certain amount of allegorizing in his Scriptural commentaries. Thus it is not surprising to see him spiritualizing the eating of the meal.

⁴P.G. 82, col. 780.

1. Hilary of Poitiers

We have a doctrinal work of Hilary¹ (writing 350-365) in which he uses proof texts from the O.T. to show the presence of Christ among men before His Incarnation and to prove His divinity. Hilary's Christology is not subordinationist. A summary follows with paragraph numbers on the left.

25 In invoking the Mamre account, Hilary assumes that Abraham saw Jesus and two angels, all three of whom were similar in their human appearance. Abraham knew by faith which one was Jesus.

26 Jesus spoke the promise (Gen. 18, 10 and 14), which earlier had been attributed to an angel of God (Gen. 16, 10); Jesus is indeed God's "angel,"² and He is also God.

27 In adoring just the one visitor, Abraham saw the mys-

¹De Trinitate, 4, 25-28. Text in P.L. 10, cols. 115-118. We will use the Patrologia Latina series, J. P. Migne, ed., 222 vols. (Paris, 1844-1864), only when more recent editions and texts are not available.

²In his refutations of the Arians Hilary used the Mamre and Jabbok theophanies, showing the activity of Jesus prior to his Incarnation, as part of his exposition of Christ's consubstantiality with the Father. For Greek and Latin fathers the use of the term "angel" with regard to Jesus referred to Christ's mission rather than to his nature. A careful examination of Hilary's use of the term "angel" for Christ shows that it does not take on any subordinationist senses. See W. G. Rusch, "Some Observations on Hilary of Poitiers' Christological Language in De Trinitate," Studia Patristica, vol. 12 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1975), 261-264.

For a brief but clear analysis of how Hilary employed all the Genesis theophanies in De Trinitate, see G. T. Armstrong, "The Genesis Theophanies of Hilary of Poitiers," Studia Patristica, vol. 10 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1970), 203-207.

tery (sacramentum) of the future Incarnation. Christ later mentions this in John 8, 56.¹ Christ remains with Abraham while the two angels go on to Sodom.

28 We know that only angels came to Lot from the texts themselves.

Here (19, 2) a simple appearance of angels merits a plural expression; there (18, 3) the faith of the patriarch gives honor to one. Here (19, 1) the history of Scripture indicates that two of the three were only angels; there (18, 3) Scripture proclaims the Lord and God. . . . Lot called them lords (19, 2) but Scripture identifies them as angels (19, 1); there (19, 2) it was the courtesy of the man, here (19, 1) the proclamation of the truth.

In commenting on our Psalm 119, 132,² "Turn to me and be gracious to me," Hilary is reminded by the word aspice of the fact that God looks on³ the punishment of the wicked as He did at Sodom; the word miserere reminds him of the mercy with which God looked on Abraham.⁴

2. Zeno of Verona

Another Western bishop, Zeno of Verona (writing before 372) has left us one brief literal sketch of the Mamre story.⁵

¹This seems to be the first Patristic use of this text from John, in connection with Gen. 18.

²Commentary on Psalm 118, B, pars. 6-7 (C.S.E.L. 22, p. 510). This is from the Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum series (Vienna: Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1866).

³Hilary reads here respexit Dominus super Sodomam, a Vetus variant in Gen. 18, 16.

⁴This seems to be the first Patristic use of Psalm 119, 132, in connection with Gen. 18.

⁵Tractates 1, 62, 1-2 (C.C. 22, p. 141).

1. Abraham heard an exile ordered for him by God, that he give up his family as well as his homeland. . . . Then Abraham, looking with his eyes, saw three men, and adored flat on his face, and offered hospitality. "Refresh yourselves," he said, "under this large tree." He made bread and killed a calf.
2. After this he was promised a son of faith, not of age, from his legitimate marriage. Sarah conceived. She who was hardly able to walk bore her burden without any effort of the womb; she learned to be a mother when she did not flow. Her drooped breasts gave an abundance of milk, and from her weak old age the stronger boy was nourished. Nothing is difficult for faith, which receives as much as it believes.

Zeno sees Abraham and Sarah as models of faith, because they believed the message given to them. Daniélou noted that Abraham is generally considered as a model of faith. In relation to the Mamre story, however, most of the Fathers have focused on the fact of the theophany rather than on the actual promise to Abraham and Sarah.

3. Gregory of Illiberia

The bishop of Elvira, Spain (writing 360-392), has a Mamre commentary in his Tractatus Origenis 2,¹ consisting mostly of short allegories.

1. His citation of Gen. 18, 1 reads ". . . ad illicem Mambre juxta exitus viarum."² Abraham was noble and admirable; he pointed to many things which are to come, not only by words but also by actions.
2. Abraham represents four different meanings which are great mysteries of the divine dispensation. He stands for the law and the prophets, the people of Israel, our Saviour and ourselves who are the future

¹C.C. 69, pp. 12-19.

²This is a minor Vetus variant. In par. 3 this highway exit is called a crossroads (quadruvium).

sons of Abraham in Christ, and lastly Abraham represents all nonbelievers.

4. The fact that wayfarers could rest at Abraham's camp is a figura that from every part of the world, from the ends of the earth, men will be led to believe in God by the apostles, who will be the future sons of Abraham.
5. Jesus himself enriched this symbol-for-the-future in Matt. 22, 8-9, where he speaks of the king who sent servants out to the roads (*exitus viarum*) to seek new guests.
6. And so we may consider the Jews to have been the originally invited wedding guests; when they declined, the Lord sent out His apostles to gather in new believers.
7. The tree at Mamre also functions clearly as a symbol of the Cross, which by others has been seen as if of hard and rough wood.
8. The tree offering shade could also be a symbol of Christ, in whom believers are protected and refreshed from the heat and passion of persecutors.
9. Abraham dwells in his tent at any one place only for a time. The tent stands for Jerusalem, where the law and the prophets, and also Jesus and His apostles, were for a time; now, since they are all gone, the earthly Jerusalem is worth nothing.
11. The two angels or men who accompanied Jesus might
12. symbolize Moses and Elias, who were together with Jesus at the Transfiguration.
13. At the end of the world, Abraham will accompany Jesus on His Second Coming, since he was our father in the faith.
14. Gregory comments on John 8, 56
Then indeed he saw the day of the Lord coming, and he knew the mystery of its aspects. He ran to the one coming to him in cheerful joy; he prepared the feast, and those things which go with the wonder of a feast he prepared, made very joyful by the spirit of prophecy; he washed the feet--all this to show a full and perfect submission at His coming.

15. So too Jesus washed his apostles' feet (children of Abraham), to purify them spiritually for their tasks.
17. Gregory adds azimos in v. 6 and reads saginaturn for bonum in v. 7.
18. The fatted calf symbolizes Christ, who is most excellent in the fulness of good works.
19. The milk is like the law, which is not solid food for the spiritually mature.
- 20-23. The butter is like the stricter life style urged upon us by John the Baptist; i.e., there is more "churning" to rid us of sin.
24. The three measures of fine flour stand for the three post-flood sons of Noah--Shem, Ham, and Japhet, from whom the whole human race now descends. From out of all mankind the just will one day eat at the heavenly banquet.
25. The just are like the purified (baptized) grains which are put in simila.
26. The unleavened bread is a symbol of being without sin. It is baked in the ashes, which are a symbol of penance and mortification. Thus sinless and purified, we shall be able to enter into panem Christi corporis.
29. Sarah is a figure of the Church, which administers the mysteries (sacramentorum) and is obedient.
30. As Sarah conceived Isaac in her old age, and he was heir to the promises, so the Church conceives, by the word of God, many children, heirs of heaven, in the world's old age.

In Tractatus Origenis 3¹ Gregory discusses Sarah's laughter

11. . . . which laughter has a twofold meaning: one is that the Christian people will be laughed at by unbelievers in this age; the other is that, in the future, laughter and joy will come, as Jesus told

¹C.C. 69, p. 22. Par. 10 repeats the contents of Tractatus 2, par. 30.

His disciples (Luke 6, 21; John 16, 22). Whence also Isaac has the name "laughter."¹

While Gregory asserts that Abraham may represent four different meanings in Scriptural accounts, the main focus of Gregory's remarks has to do with the Christian Church. Gregory is interested in the role of the larger community of believers, in the holiness to which we are called as individuals, in the role of the Holy Spirit, and in the Jews as a community which continues not to accept Jesus.

Many of his brief allegories touch new themes--the universality of the Church, the tree as Cross, its shade as Jesus, the present worthlessness of Jerusalem, the law as milk and the Baptist's message as butter, and so on. However, in form, his allegories are similar to those of Origen.

4. Ambrose

Perhaps the Western Father who best exemplifies the Western tendency to pick and choose exegetical points from the various Eastern schools is Ambrose, the dynamic bishop of Milan in the last quarter of the fourth century. His major commentary on our passage is found in De Abraham 1, 32-44, which we will summarize here.²

¹There is a minor allusion to the presence of Christ at the Mamre event in his De Fide 80 (C.C. 69, p. 242); "God was also seen by Abraham, but in the form of a human being, in order to show exactly that in a later time He would come as a man."

²C.S.E.L. Vol. 32, 18, pp. 526-534.

- 32 We should note Abraham's hospitality, a virtue in which he was not average.¹ He sat alert at the door of his tent at noon (while others would be resting) in order to look for the arrival of guests. God rewarded his eager longing to be a host with an apparition.²
- 33 God appears to him and he sees three beings; this is a mystery of faith. Whomever God shines on, sees the Trinity.
Let us look at some of the ethical meanings of the text. Abraham rushed to greet his guests; it is not enough to do good--you must also do it quickly.
- 34 Hospitality earns one first the gratitude of the guests and then divine reward. We are all guests in this life; if we have not been gracious to our fellow men in this life, when we travel on to the next life we shall not be hosted by the saints. We have a tendency to look down on travellers, but all of us at some time have either the desire or the need to travel. Would you want a poor traveller to rest with animals in their dens rather than with humans? Do you use your own poverty as an excuse?
- 35 A guest will be satisfied with pot-luck (*cibum obvium*). Thus Jesus speaks of how blessed one will be who gives just a drink of water in His name, and so on.
- 36 As hosts we need willingness and eagerness. Abraham demonstrated these virtues when he served all three visitors, even though he regarded only one of them as chief.

¹Abraham's hospitality impressed Ambrose. He mentions it in on Luke 5, 63 (S.C. 45, p. 206) and urges clergy to imitate it in De Officiis 2, 21, 104 and 107 (P.L. 16, cols. 139-140. Lot is also considered to be hospitable in this excerpt, 105 and 107).

Abraham's hospitality at the footwashing is contrasted with the humility of Jesus at the Mandatum in De Sanct. Spir. 1, Prologue, 15 (C.S.E.L. 79, p. 21).

In De Helia et Jejunio 5, 13 (C.S.E.L. 32, 2, p. 420) Ambrose approvingly notes the absence of wine from Abraham's table at Mamre.

²God's appearance at noon indicates His splendor and love. So De Joseph 10, 52 (C.S.E.L. 32, 2, p. 108) and on Psalm 118 8, 50 (our Psalm 119, 62) (C.S.E.L. 62, p. 181).

- 37 Abraham allowed Sarah to share in the duties and rewards of hospitality. A good husband will not be selfish in this regard; nor will he be loathe to join in when his wife has initiated a similar action. At Mamre, while decency demands that Sarah not meet the guests herself, nevertheless she truly participates in the deed and she can hasten as well as Abraham can.
- 38 The cakes are hidden under the coals; this reminds us to be secretive on sacred topics. Also, in using three measures of the one substance of flour, Sarah was pre-figuring the trinity of persons and the oneness of divinity.
- 39 The fine flour is more "spiritual." The calf is a sign of Christ's passion.¹ The boy who dresses the calf is pure and innocent, and so worthy to handle the mystery of the calf.
- 40 So this calf is sacrificed at noon in purity of faith; Passover calves are sacrificed at eventide, with blood. This good calf will atone for sins; this tender calf will not refuse to shoulder the Cross.
- 41 Abraham stood and served the visitors; he was humble. You, however, sit at the main place at table.
- 42 God knows where Sarah is when He asks after her, but He wants to stress her decency and modesty. Adam also now reflects on the great task which God wants her to perform in having a child at her age.²

¹In *De Sanct. Spir.* 1, Prologue, 4 (C.S.E.L. 79, p. 17) the calves used by Gideon and Abraham were types of Christ. The reference to Abraham can be called an allusion to Mamre only, in that John 8, 56 is cited.

²Sarah's lack of monthly periods is allegorized in *De Fuga*, 47 (C.S.E.L. 32, 2, pp. 200-201). "Womanly ways" are our evil inclinations. Sarah had to cease from these before being deemed worthy to have Isaac. The lessening of desires and vanity is at the same time a building up of virtue. "Isaac" means joy and gladness before God.

43 Sarah laughed in anticipation of the laughter that would accompany the news of her having a child. Her laughter was not a deliberate act of disbelief.¹

44 The fact that Abraham escorted his visitors when they left adds just that much more intensity to the punishments for Sodom and the other cities.²

As pars. 33 and 38 of the De Abraham selection above indicate, Ambrose was inclined to consider the Trinity as having been typified at Mamre. In De Excessu Fratris 2, 96³ we read that at Mamre Abraham saw a type of the Trinity; he saw three and adored one.

. . . and the distinction of persons being observed, Abraham called only one Lord; to three he offered the honor of his gift but he indicated power to one. Doctrine did not move him but grace; he believed better what he had not learned than we do who have been taught. No one had falsified the type of the truth, so he saw three but worshipped one. He gave three measures of flour and cooked one calf. He believed one sacrifice enough, a triple gift; one victim, a triple service.⁴

Occasionally, however, in discussions on Christ's divinity and His relationships with the Father and the Spirit, Ambrose will use the Mamre account as a proof that the pre-

¹In Luke 2, 17 (S.C. 45, p. 80), Sarah's laughter at the news is mentioned; in contrast the Virgin Mary (Luke 1, 38) asks not about the fact of her conceiving, but about how her pregnancy is to be initiated.

²In on Psalm 118 17, 12 (C.S.E.L. 62, p. 383) (our Psalm 119, 132) Ambrose notes that respicere (Gen. 18, 16 Vetus variant) often indicates God's anger.

³C.S.E.L. 73, p. 302.

⁴Similar opinions can be found in De Cain 1, 30 (C.S.E.L. 32, 1A, p. 365) and De Sanct. Spir. 2, Prologue, 4 (C.S.E.L. 79, pp. 87-88).

Incarnate Christ alone appeared at Mamre.¹ In on Luke 1, 25² he even implies that Jesus had to be the divine visitor at Mamre since God the Father can never be seen by men. Generally, however, Ambrose does not espouse a subordinationist Christology.

Conclusions

I think it is clear that Ambrose often borrowed "sermon illustration" types and allegories from the Alexandrian traditions. Some of the themes common to Ambrose and Origen, for example, would include allegorizing the noon visit with God's full revelation of Himself, that the cakes signify the secrecy which should surround spiritual matters, that no one is slow in the house of a wise man, that the calf in some ways is a type of Christ, and that the three measures of flour are a symbol of the Trinity. Also common to both churchmen is the contrasting of the humility of Jesus with the hospitality of Abraham in the matter of footwashing, and the allegorizing of Sarah's "womanly" inclinations as evil, and Isaac as representing joy.

On the other hand, Ambrose is personally interested in exhorting his flock to hospitality and almsgiving, and so he stressed the actual hospitality afforded by Abraham and

¹De Fide 1, 13, 80 and 2, 8, 72 (C.S.E.L. 78, pp. 35 and 82); on Luke 5, 97 (S.C. 45, p. 218).

²S.C. 45, p. 59.

Sarah in a manner reminiscent of Chrysostom.¹

Ambrose is responsible for the exegetical mixture which he makes. His effectiveness as a preacher and church leader could not have come from the mere imitation of other exegetes.

5. Jerome

St. Jerome (writing 380-415) was one of the outstanding Christian Scripture scholars of the early Church. His new Latin translation of the Old Testament from the Hebrew represented a significant advance in accuracy and style.²

¹In detail, Chrysostom is much the master preacher on the matter of aiding the poor. I do not mean to imply that Ambrose borrowed directly from Chrysostom.

²There are some usages in the Vulgate which should be mentioned. We will use Biblia Sacra Juxta Vulgata Versionem, R. Weber, ed. (Stuttgart, 1969). In vv. 1, 3, 12, 13 Jerome uses Dominus (dominus in 13) whereas the MT uses two different words. Further Jerome uses Deus in v. 14, while the MT does not use a new word. In v. 15 Jerome identifies the rebuker as Dominus; the MT does not identify the rebuker at all. Other striking changes include the first person adferam in v. 4, the superlatives tenerrimum and optimum in v. 7, and the phrase timore perterrita in v. 15. It is difficult to say how many of these expressions are peculiar to Jerome, since the MT we use is from a later date, but we must at least admit the possibility that Jerome was capable of making his own modifications of the Hebraic sense. The Roman Catholic Douay version faithfully keeps all of Jerome's nuances, except for the timore perterrita phrase in v. 15.

The use of convalle in v. 1 might point to Jerome's awareness of the Rabbinic use of קִישְׁלוֹ. Many phrases indicate how similar Jerome's Hebrew text must have been to our MT. Thus propter (v. 2), in oculis tuis (v. 3), pauxillum aquae and lavate (v. 4), buccelam (v. 5), sata (v. 6), and dixerunt (v. 9) are all close renditions of our MT. In v. 10 (and similarly in 14) tempore isto vita comite is a very serious effort to render כִּסְּתָה חַיָּה. Consenui and voluptate operam dabo in v. 12, and the juxta condictum of v. 14 are also close to

Aside from his translation work, however, we have only a few references to the Mamre account. In Letter 66, 11, to Pammachius,¹ Jerome mentions that Pammachius had started a

the MT. In v. 16 the Vulgate, like the MT, does not mention Gomorrah.

As an example of his attention to style, let us look at Jerome's sensitivity to the frequency of the conjunction waw in Hebrew. Jerome uses an alternative for the Vetus et, or drops it altogether, in twelve instances where the MT has a waw. These are וַיָּחַם and the second וַיֵּרָא of v. 2; וַיִּשְׁחַק and וַיִּשְׁמַח of v. 5; וַיִּשְׂאֵל and וַיִּתֵּן of v. 7; וַיִּשְׁלַח of v. 8 and וַיִּשְׁמַח in vv. 9, 10 and 13. The Vetus retained all twelve of these and the LXX kept ten, dropping the cases in vv. 9 and 10. In addition the LXX and Vetus may have read וַיִּשְׁחַח in v. 5 and וַיִּשְׁחַח in v. 6, but Jerome adopts neither reading. In fact Jerome has only two new uses of et in the entire passage: the et coxit of v. 7 and the et desierant of v. 11. The effect of using these alternate constructions or of simply dropping the waw in the translation is to produce a more flowing, less wooden Latin reading.

In Jerome's Quaestiones Hebraicae in Genesim (C.C. 72, p. 22) we find a few examples of the kind of scholarship which was behind his translation. Concerning v. 6, he notes that the mensuras of the Vetus is a vague unit. He understands it to mean three sata, or amphorae; he also notes that three sata are spoken of in Matt. 13, 33. On v. 10, Jerome's Vetus text read in tempore hoc et in futura (a Vetus variant). He observes that the Hebrew means vitam instead of hora. Thus the sense should be

"I will return to you in the time of life. It is as if he had said 'If I live, if there is life accompanying . . .'"

"Revertar ad te in temporae vitae: quasi dixerit Si vixero, si fuerit vita comitata. . . ."

On v. 12, Jerome notes that the Hebrew means "Postquam attrita sum, facta est mihi voluptas"? rather than the milder statements of the LXX and Vetus. He acknowledges that Symmachus' Greek is close to his own tastes. Indeed, in the Vulgate, consenui might be due to the influence of Symmachus. In v. 12 the Vulgate operam dabo seems to be a little stronger than any factum/a est mihi construction.

¹C.S.E.L. 54, pp. 661-662.

hospice and had "planted a twig from Abraham's tree."¹ He then proceeds to recall the Mamre story, here summarized.

Abraham and Sarah did the hosting themselves; they did not dilute the merit of their service by using servants. Abraham himself² washed their feet. He brought the fatted calf from the flock on his shoulders; he stood by the travellers as a waiter does, and he placed before them the food which Sarah herself had cooked. He intended to abstain from eating.

Elsewhere³ Jerome advances the allegory⁴ that the brightness of noontime is the proper time for God the Father to come in His full glory to someone worthy like Abraham. He returns to this theme again⁵ in speaking of Lot, who had less faith because of his long dwelling in Sodom. Lot therefore received a lesser vision than did Abraham at noon.

¹In his Letter 108, 11, to Eustocius (C.S.E.L. 55), Jerome mentions the Holy Land travels of a certain Paula, who reportedly was shown "the remains of Abraham's oak." It is conceivable that Jerome's phrase in Letter 66 does refer to a real twig. One or both of these references might have been made in regard to Constantine's basilica at Mamre, where a tree and a well were featured in the courtyard.

²This from the adferam in the Vulgate of Gen. 18, 4.

³His commentary on Habbakuk 2 3, 3 (C.C. 76A, pp. 622-623).

⁴Jerome was an admirer of Origen and the Alexandrian school of allegory, in spite of his own concern for the literal meaning of biblical texts. His teachers included representatives of both major schools, Alexandria and Antioch, as well as Palestinian Jews and proselytes. Louis Hartmann, in his article on Jerome's background, works, and worth as an exegete, shows that Jerome's eclectic borrowing from all three systems was a consistent and deliberate procedure (p. 72). Cf. L. Hartmann, "St. Jerome as an Exegete," A Monument to St. Jerome, F. X. Murphy, ed. (Sheed and Ward, 1952), pp. 37-81.

⁵Letter 122, to Rusticus, 1 (C.S.E.L. 56, p. 57).

Jerome had a high regard for virginity and apparently considered post-menopausal women to be more capable of virgin-like spiritual progress than their sisters in the child bearing years. He often mentions Sarah's aged condition in this regard.¹

In Against the Pelagians 1, 34² Jerome speaks of our interior dispositions, which are as important as our actions. As an example of an interior disposition that was not acceptable to God, Jerome mentions Abraham and Sarah, who had laughed in their hearts at Mamre; this indicated a bit of unbelief or lack of confidence, and was properly rebuked. After the rebuke, they believed and they received the palm of justice.

In his commentary on Daniel 2,³ on Dn. 8, 15b, Jerome notes that at Mamre Abraham saw the three angels whom he thought were men, and he adored one of them as Lord. This one was Jesus, who later said that Abraham had seen His day and had rejoiced (John 8, 56).

The majority of Jerome's scholarship and commentary on the Mamre story is literal, after his own and the Antiochean manner. His understanding that the pre-Incarnate Christ was

¹So in Against Helvidius, 20 (P.L. 23, col. 214); on Zephaniah, 1, 2-3 (C.C. 76A, p. 660); Letter 65, to Principia, 1, (C.S.E.L. 54, p. 617); and on Micah 2, 4, 8-9 (C.C. 76, p. 476).

²P.L. 23, col. 551.

³C.C. 75A, p. 857.

the subject of the theophany, and his few spiritual allegories, show his connections with the more dominant Patristic traditions.

6. St. Augustine

Augustine (writing 395-427) makes some use of the Mamre passage in his doctrinal works.¹ The most interesting theological application he makes is to assume that the Trinity appeared at Mamre, rather than the pre-Incarnate Christ alone. This preference for a Trinitarian explanation fits in with his assumption that the Trinity can be known from creation, rather than from the Incarnation of Jesus.² The argument is laid out

¹For a brief overview of Augustine's treatment of Scripture, see G. L. Keyes, Christian Faith and the Interpretation of History (University of Nebraska Press, 1966), pp. 83-123 (esp. pp. 111-123). Keyes shows that Augustine approached history, philosophy, theology, and the Scriptures primarily as an apologist. As such, he uses these disciplines in an uneven, a priori fashion. Keyes' observation that Augustine frequently takes an Old Testament use of the number three as a symbol for the Trinity should not keep us from appreciating Augustine's precision in analyzing the Mamre theophany as a mediate vision granted to Abraham and Sarah. M. Pontet (p. 288) also notes Augustine's frequent discovery of Trinitarian symbols in the Old Testament, in L'Exégèse de Saint Augustine Prédicateur (Paris: Aubier, 1947).

J. B. Payne offers the suggestion that much of Augustine's allegorizing of difficult Scriptural passages may stem from the problems such passages cause for one who adheres to the concept that the Scriptures were verbally inspired. Augustine will use allegory with the Jabbok story. Cf. J. B. Payne, "Biblical Problems and Augustine's Allegorizing," Westminster Theological Journal 14 (1951), 46-53.

²See N.C.E., "St. Augustine," by O. Du Roy, esp. pp. 1051-1053.

most clearly in Contra Maximinum 2, 26, 5 ff.¹

- 5 It is not stated in Gen. 18, 1 whether the Father or the Son appeared to Abraham at Mamre. In any case, we are told that these three men appeared to him; in these three we should more probably understand the Trinity, which is one God. It is clear from the story that Abraham regarded them simply as men. In v. 16 we must realize that the number of men whom Abraham escorted is not specified. It could have been all three who had been with Abraham.
- 6 The customary explanation has been that Christ and two angels had come to Mamre; but what if we also find one Lord in the two angels who went on to Sodom? Augustine argues from God's intention (18, 21), Lot's bowing down (19, 1), and Lot's singular address in 19, 18 (my Lord),² that the encounter Lot had was a true theophany and not just a visit by angels.
- 7 Abraham did not favor any one visitor. He washed their feet and fed them as equals, and so he saw God in all of them. Lot dealt in a similar way with his visitors. Therefore both Abraham and Lot understood that God was in the angelic visitors, whether they were three or two in number. In the case of Abraham, the three might be the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, but we know that this is one God. In the case of Lot, the two who were sent might be the Son and Holy Ghost, since the Father is never described as being sent.³

¹Most of our citations will be from Sancti Aureli Augustini Hipponensis Episcopi Opera Omnia (Benedictine monks of St. Maur, Paris, 1835-1839). This reference can be found in O.A., vol. 8, cols. 1127-1131.

²This singular is the Vetus reading (also the Vulgate); the MT has a plural.

³In Sermon 7, 3-6 (O.A. 5, cols. 56-59) Augustine again stresses the full Trinitarian nature of the Mamre theophany. The triune God has come as a single figure in the burning bush, as two people at Sodom, and as three at Mamre. The best way to express it is to say that God can appear when and where He wishes, and in whatever form He wishes. Brief similar analyses can be found in City of God 16, 29 (O.A. 7, cols. 702-704); De Trinitate 2, 10, 19/2, 11, 20-22/2, 18, 34 (O.A. 8, cols. 1204/1205-1206/1216).

In De Trinitate 3, 11, 25 (O.A. 8, col. 1237) we are again reminded that there were three real angels at Mamre, in

Augustine's other uses of the Mamre account utilize literal elements of the story. The angels who appeared at Mamre had real flesh. Letter 95, 8¹ asserts that Abraham washed their feet and fed them. In Sermon 277, 9² we are told that Abraham did not merely wash their feet, but actually gripped their feet and ankles in the process.³ They were good angels, even though they then went on to destroy Sodom and the other cities on God's orders.⁴

The miracle of Sarah's conceiving and bearing at such an age is commented upon occasionally by Augustine. For example, in Contra Julian 3, 11, 22⁵ we read that God restored

whom God was seen. In De Genesi ad Litteram 11, 34 (46) on Gen. 3, 10 (B.A. 49, p. 306) we read that God dealt with Abraham at Mamre "as men who speak with a man." B.A. references are from Oeuvres de Saint Augustine, Bibliothèque Augustienne series (Paris: Desclée, 1947-1952).

One N.T. observation of Augustine's should be mentioned here. Several commentators have previously applied John 8, 56 to the Mamre story as a proof that Abraham had dealt with the pre-Incarnate Christ. Augustine instead, in Contra Max. 2, 26, 8¹ (O.A. 8, cols. 1131-1132) prefers to understand "my day" as meaning "my years on earth." Thus Abraham, and other prophets, were gifted with the knowledge that at some time in the future God the Son would live on earth. This interpretation leaves the Mamre story free to be explained by Augustine as a theophany of the full Trinity.

¹O.A. 2, col. 389.

²O.A. 5.2, col. 1640.

³Brief references to angelic bodies at Mamre may also be found in Letter 158, 6 (O.A. 2, col. 839) and Enchiridion 59 (O.A. 6, col. 376).

⁴So on Psalms 78, 29 (O.A. 4.1, cols. 1190-1191).

⁵O.A. 10.1, cols. 1007-1009.

fertility to Abraham and Sarah (especially Sarah) in order to emphasize the wonder of the miracle. Abraham was sterile relative to an old woman (even were she fertile), but he could possibly have had children by a young woman.¹

Several of these literal comments are repeated in Quaestiones in Genesim, 33-37 and 41,² summarized here.

We should say that God was in all three angels; these angels seemed to be men and so Abraham offered them food. Abraham might have been able to father offspring by a younger woman. Sarah's laughter came from her doubt. The fact that she was bold enough to deny having laughed makes us wonder when she and Abraham realized that their guests were not merely men. It could even have been the case that Abraham and Sarah first learned this when the angels ascended to the heavens at the end of the visit. Lot was also slow to comprehend who his visitors really were.³

¹Similar remarks can be found in City of God 10, 8 (O.A. 7, col. 391) and De Genesi ad Litteram 9, 17 (32) (B.A. 49, p. 140). The miracle of Sarah's rejuvenation is compared with the greater miracle of Mary's virginal conception of Jesus in Pseudo-Augustine Christmas Sermon 19, 2 (Caillau-St. Yves series 2, 27. P.L. Supp. 2, col. 1042). In De Mendacio 5 (O.A. 6, col. 715) Augustine mentions that Sarah's denial of her laughter seems to have had a good result. Even so, Augustine is not satisfied that, on that account, we too may sometimes bend the truth. He does not return to the Mamre account when explaining his dissatisfaction.

²O.A. 3.1, cols. 615-618.

³In Locutiones de Genesi (O.A. 3.1, col. 525) Augustine notes that, literally translated, the LXX would read *accucurrit in boves in v. 7, and progressi dierum in v. 11*. In Pseudo-Augustine Speculum 141 (C.S.E.L. 12, pp. 693-695) there are collected together the texts of Gen. 18, 1-5; Gen. 43, 23-24; John 13, 2-17; and First Timothy 5, 9-10. In these four passages Abraham, Joseph, Jesus, and approved widows respectively are involved in the service of footwashing. There is no additional commentary.

Augustine's precision in explaining how Mamre was a mediate theophany of the full Trinity (involving three en-fleshed angels of equal appearance) is welcome, since it clearly stresses God's ability to appear to anyone in any fashion that He wills. His other observations should also be looked upon as attempts to take the story literally.

F. Western Writers after Augustine

To conclude our survey of Western Fathers, I include sixteen writers who worked after Augustine. They are arranged by geographic region and only then chronologically, starting with African churchmen close to the time of Augustine and ending with Venerable Bede.¹ Perhaps the single most interesting feature of this group is the growing consensus that the visit at Mamre was a visit of the Trinity.

Africa

1. In Liber Genealogus (anon. c. 427)² Isaac's name, which means joy, is related to Sarah's laughter at the promise made at Mamre. Gen. 21, 6 is not cited.

2. Quodvultdeus (writing c. 440-450) mentions³ that

¹For a brief perspective of this period see N.C.E., "Exegesis, Medieval," by R. E. McNally, esp. pp. 707-710.

²Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi, vol. 9 (Berlin, 1892), "Liber Genealogus," 160-196. This passage is from section 226, pp. 172-173.

³De Promissionibus 1, 15, 22 (P.L. 51, col. 745).

the divine majesty appeared in the three men at Mamre. This use of the phrase "appear in" is reminiscent of Augustine, whom Quodvultdeus is known to have imitated.¹

3. Vigilius of Thapsus (writing before 484) also prefers to see the Trinity at Mamre.²

4. Pseudo-Fulgentius of Ruspe (6th cent.) uses Augustinian phrasing to explain that the Trinity appeared in the visitors.³

Italy

5. Maximus (d. 428) held that Christ alone visited at Mamre.⁴

6. Gregory the Great (writing 595-601) in Moralium 9, 66, 106,⁵ allegorizes Sarah to represent our bodily impulses and Abraham as our spiritual motivation. Abraham went outside to greet visitors

because clearly our intellect, as man and lord of our spiritual house, should go beyond the door of the flesh in knowledge of the Trinity.

¹DuRoy, "St. Augustine," p. 1056.

²So Contra Arianos 2, 43 (P.L. 62, col. 225), and also Pseudo-Vigilius Contra Varimadum 1, 1 (P.L. 62, col. 353).

³Adversus Pintam 8 (P.L. 65, col. 715).

⁴In Contra Judaeos, 2 and 11 (JTS 20 [1919], pp. 295 and 309), Maximinus uses the Gen. 19, 24 proof that Christ sent the fire upon Sodom at His Father's command. In Contra Ambrosium 106 (P.L. Supp. 1, col. 718) he also asserts that Christ was at Mamre.

⁵P.L. 75, cols. 917-918.

Sarah waited in the tent since

the concern of the flesh, like a woman, should not appear outdoors and she should blush to seem to be boastful; she should be intent only on necessary things as if behind the back of the man, under the direction of the spirit. In no way should she know how to be boldly uncovered but rather she should know how to be shyly restrained.

Sarah's lack of monthly periods and her miraculous rejuvenation and child bearing can also be taken symbolically to mean that we grow in faith as our carnal self confidence fails us.

France

7. Cyprian of Gaul (early 5th cent.) rendered much of the O.T. into poetic form. The Mamre story received some noteworthy nuances.¹ The three men were of equal rank (598, 621) and God was represented by all of them (611). Cyprian puts more terms in the singular than does the Bible (e.g., v. 4, 602-603). The calf is described as having no blemishes (609); otherwise Cyprian uses no allegories in this part of his poetry.²

¹Heptateuch, Genesis lines 596 to 622 (C.S.E.L. 23, pp. 23-24).

²Cyprian is also credited with a biblical image essay entitled Coena (P.L. 4, cols. 1007-1014). In this work important biblical figures attend a mysterious banquet and say or do things which remind us of biblical stories. While the literary merit of this essay is rather small, we can point out the actions of Abraham and Sarah. Abraham sits under a tree; he has his own servants with him. He donates a calf for the banquet and later is depicted as eating veal. He also donates milk. Later he thanks God for His favor (the gesture of Abraham towards his thigh indicates that he is grateful for having been father to Isaac). Sarah donates firewood for the banquet and later she kneads some dough. She too is grateful for her

8. Eucherius of Lyons (writing 428) mentions that the cakes which Sarah baked in the ashes signify humility.¹

9. Evagrius of Gaul (writing 430) sees the Mamre account as a Christophany in his Jewish polemic Altercatio 2, 1.²

10. Pseudo-Hilary of Arle (writing 450) notes Sarah's obedience to Abraham (she called him lord in Gen. 18, 12).³

11. Faustus Reiensis (d. 480) expresses the Trinitarian interpretation of the Mamre theophany by saying that "from the one, three miraculously appeared to his eyes."⁴

12. Caesarius of Arle (d. 542) was the author of several sermons which eventually were attributed to St. Augustine. The longest of these which refers to the Mamre story is Sermon 83, 2-5.⁵ This is very clearly imitative of Origen's Genesis Homily 4, 1-3. In addition, in par. 5, we find the flour

motherhood, pointing to her abdomen. In one arcane allusion, Abraham buys a field in which to bury Achar, son of Charmi, and Sarah laughs when Judas takes the money. This could be a reminder of her laughter in Gen. 18, if an indirect one. Cyprian does not use allegory in this theme in Coena.

¹Formulae Spirituale 7 (C.S.E.L. 31, p. 40).

²C.S.E.L. 45, p. 4.

³Commentary on First Peter 3, 6 (C.C. 1088, p. 87). This is the first instance I have found of someone apparently citing the Vulgate translation of Gen. 18.

⁴De Spir. Sanct. 1, 6 (C.S.E.L. 21, p. 109).

⁵O.A. 5.2, cols. 2301-2303, identified as Pseudo-Augustine Sermon 5; also in C.C. 103, pp. 340-343, attributed to Caesarius.

divided into three units as an allegory of the Trinity.¹ In another sermon² we find the stress on the hospitality and kindness of Abraham. No allegories are used; the Trinity appeared in the visitors.³ Food is really eaten and Sarah is really rejuvenated.

Germany

13. Avitus of Vienna (writing c. 516) explains⁴ that any O.T. passage which suggests plural aspects about God is referring to the full Trinity. Thus at Mamre all three visitors were equal in every way and Abraham understood the mystery of the undivided Trinity.

Spain

14. Isadore of Seville (writing c. 624) in Quaestiones

¹This is similar to Ambrose, De Abraham 38, mentioned earlier.

²Pseudo-Augustine Sermon 3, 2-3 (P.L. 39, cols. 1743-1744). In the Bueron index volume, p. 56, it is pointed out that the same pseudonymous author who wrote this Sermon 3 also wrote Sermons 7, 23, 27, 46-50, 59, 60, 99, and 135; Caesarius made use of Sermon 135. We will therefore include this Sermon 3 here with the writings of Caesarius, since its author was probably influenced by Augustine in much the same way as Caesarius was.

³Note the Augustinian formula concerning the mode of theophany. In Sermon 121, 2 (C.C. 103, p. 505; also known as Pseudo-Augustine Sermon 37) we again see that Abraham saw the Trinity in his visitors.

⁴Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi, vol. 6.2 (Berlin, 1883), "Dialogi cum Gundobadi Rege," 1-15. This passage is from section 18, p. 8.

in Genesim 14¹ finds many allegories in the Mamre story. In general he allegorizes in much the same fashion as his fellow Spaniard, Gregory of Elvira, who wrote over two hundred years earlier. Like Gregory, Isadore makes no mention of Trinitarian allegories, although he does find several Christological ones. We will mention here those items which Isadore has that Gregory does not have.

The feet of the visitors stand for novissima; therefore the washing of the feet represents the resurrection of all at the end of the world. The butter which Abraham served represents the Gospels, which are the richer law. The wetting of the flour by Sarah signifies Baptism. Sarah's laughter represents the laughter which Jesus will direct at unbelievers or that which He will direct at all His enemies at the Last Judgement.

England

15. Anon. Monk of Lindisfarne, Life of Saint Cuthbert (written 698-705). In Book 2, Ch. 2 we read that Cuthbert, while guest-master at Ripon monastery, was visited by an angel in the form of a man. Cuthbert went to prepare an adequate meal but the guest disappeared while he was doing so. As a heavenly reward three fresh loaves of bread were then miraculously found by Cuthbert in the storeroom. The author mentions that angels in the form of men had likewise come to Abraham at Mamre.²

¹P.L. 83, cols. 243-244. Isadore seems to use the Vulgate.

²English translation by C. Albertson Anglo-Saxon Saints and Sinners (Fordham University Press, 1967), pp. 42-43. The Latin text and a translation can be found in B. Col-

16. Bede (674-735) has an extensive commentary on the Mamre story,¹ which borrows often from writings of Augustine, Ambrose, Gregory the Great, and others. I will summarize the work here, mentioning new material, but not identifying his sources.²

Verse 1 Mamre and his family were allied with Abraham; so too we, although of Gentile lineage, also have Abraham as our spiritual father. This should stir sentiments of humility within us. Abraham and Sarah saw what they thought were strangers and performed many hospitable acts for them. Abraham, and all of

grave's book Two Lives of St. Cuthbert (Cambridge University Press, 1940), pp. 76-79; notes on p. 317.

Bede's prose Life of St. Cuthbert, Ch. 7, in which he used the anonymous Life extensively, tells the same story, but fails to explicitly mention the Mamre parallel. Bede's metrical Life of St. Cuthbert, Ch. 8, also does not explicitly mention Mamre. The Latin text and a translation of the prose Life can be found in Colgrave's book, pp. 174-179. The Latin text of the metrical Life can be found in P.L. 94, col. 580.

Colgrave's article, "Bede's Miracle Stories," in Bede, His Life, Time, and Writings, A. H. Thompson, ed. (London, 1932; reprinted New York: Russell and Russell, 1966), introduces one to the world of Patristic hagiography, a world with which our research only makes contact in this one event from Cuthbert's life. As to why Bede failed to mention explicitly the Mamre connection discussed above, Colgrave postulates several other Scriptural stories which Bede could have considered to be equally well involved (p. 210).

¹In Genesim, bk. 4 (C.C. 118A, pp. 209-219), arranged by biblical chapters and verses. The C.C. 118A apparatus identifies borrowed material. Bede uses the Vulgate.

²Claude Jenkins, in his article "Bede as Exegete and Historian," in the same book, Bede, His Life, Time, and Writings, points out that Bede was often reluctant to include his own personal exegesis of a verse (p. 153). Sometimes he even repeats the explanation of another writer while using the first person singular. Nevertheless Jenkins affirms that Bede's editorial work alone entitles him to be considered as an original author (p. 170).

us, are pilgrims, citizens of another world; we are tent dwellers in this time, not permanent residents. However, we have to deal with secular matters at times and, like Abraham, we look to a future reward. The heat of the day signifies love of virtue, and also hope for Christ's coming, and contemplation of divine love.

Vv. 2-3

The Trinity was in the three men; as Abraham spoke to and adored one, this reminds us of the equality of worship which the Trinity merits. Abraham lifted his eyes as a sign for us to contemplate higher things. The meal reminds us of the later time when Jesus ate and drank and accepted the hospitality of others. Jesus, of course, was more interested in evangelizing and in healing the sick than in the actual meals themselves.

Vv. 6-7

The flour means the inner sweetness of the word of God; the three measures stand for the three kinds of Scripture interpretation--historical, allegorical, and anagogical. The loaves are packed under the coals; so also truly spiritual people must come in close contact with the Holy Spirit before they can become "food" for their fellow Christians. The calf is Christ, offered by the Father in joy at the return of the prodigal son (the Gentiles). Christ, in whose blood the world is redeemed, is the especially chosen one of all mankind.

Verse 8

The milk stands for the Mosaic laws; the butter for evangelical perfection. The milk stands for the literal sense of Scripture; the butter for the mystical sense. The milk represents the beginning of faith; the butter for the perfection of faith. As Abraham placed the food before the visitors, we sons of promise should place spiritual food before other people. The bread is the Scriptures; the calf is the message of the Incarnate Christ. The milk is the perfecting of faith and history; the butter is good attitudes and good works. We should remember that we always stand before the Lord in all of our actions.

Vv. 9-10

Sarah rejoiced not only for her own motherhood, but also for the blessings to be poured out on many nations through her child. When we receive the Lord with faith and good works so too will grace

come to us. The angels seemed to eat,¹ in order to prefigure Christ's Incarnation; they do eat invisible food--the joy of contemplation. Thus the food which Abraham served was evaporated as if by a flame and did not serve for nourishment in any conventional sense.

Verse 12 Sarah was undecided; Abraham did not display any lack of confidence himself.

Verse 13 Actually Sarah was doubting and overjoyed at the same time; her doubt was eliminated by the angel's remark in v. 14.

Verse 14 Bede tries to explain the Vulgate's *vita comite* by rewording it as *si vita comes fuerit*; a higher interpretation is that the angels are always accompanying *Vita* in heaven or on earth, and later on so will the saints. Bede notes many contrasts between Adam and Eve and Abraham and Sarah. Adam hid in the bushes and avoided the light; Abraham ran in the noonday sun. Adam ate forbidden fruit and had to go away from the tree of life; obedient Abraham hosted God under a tree. Eve spoke to the serpent, ignoring God's command, and she got herself and Adam in trouble; Sarah stayed in the background, fearing God, and she helped her husband and received an equal reward. Through Adam and Eve all have suffered; through Abraham and Sarah we are all blessed by Christ, the new Isaac, who saves us all.

Verse 16 Abraham escorted his visitors as part of the hospitality which he offered; blessed are they who so walk through life that angels will come to escort them to heaven.

It should be clear from the above overview that the Trinitarian explanation of the Mamre theophany begins to dominate. Of the twelve writers who touch on the question, nine hold for the Trinity.

Bede refers to meals which Jesus had during his earthly life. This theme was last alluded to clearly by

¹Bede notes Tobit 12, 19 here.

Irenaeus. He also makes comparisons between Abraham and Sarah and Adam and Eve. This has not appeared in any other of our Patristic sources.

Excursus

In addition to written works, we should examine ancient artistic representations of the Mamre story. Perhaps they will be additional indicators of the popular understanding of this biblical passage.

There is a mural panel of three young men (usually understood by art historians to be the three visitors at Mamre) on the north half of the west wall of the third century Dura-Europas synagogue in Syria. The central man's robe is of a lighter color than that of his two companions.¹ There is no representation of Abraham or Sarah nor any scenery from the story in this mural.

The earliest Christian representation of the visit is

¹This synagogue is very famous in the history of Jewish art. A good color plate of the three men can be found in E. R. Goodenough, Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period, 13 vols. (Pantheon, 1952), vol. 11, pl. 13. His commentary is in vol. 10, 91-97.

Cf. Michael Avi-Yonah, "Goodenough's Evaluation of the Dura Paintings: A Critique," The Dura-Europas Synagogue: A Re-evaluation, Joseph Gutmann, ed. (AAR/SBL, 1973), pp. 117-135. This study of Goodenough's artistic interpretations is helpful for putting Goodenough's remarks about Philo in perspective. Gutmann's article "Programmatic Painting in the Dura Synagogue," on pp. 137-154 of the same book, relates the paintings to the liturgies held in the same room. See esp. pp. 146-149.

from the Via Latina catacomb in Rome.¹ This mural shows three men approaching a seated Abraham. The central man is somewhat shorter than the other two. Abraham is raising his right hand in blessing, and next to him is a very young calf.

We have literary references to and archaeological remains of a basilica at Mamre. This building was planned and financed by Emperor Constantine as part of a series of commemorative churches in the Holy Land.

Eusebius of Caesarea gives an account of the founding of the shrine at Mamre in his Life of Constantine, 3, 51-53.² Several remarks in these three chapters indicate that Constantine believed that the theophany involved Christ and two angels. In his Demonstratio Evangelica 5, 9,³ Eusebius mentions an artistic representation of the Mamre scene, presumably at the shrine. This context also indicates that Christ and two angels were the principal subjects of the work.

The site of the basilica was excavated by E. Mader. Remains indicate that originally the church was on one side of a courtyard which contained an old well and the large oak tree supposedly used by Abraham.⁴

¹See color plate 24.2 in A. Ferrua, Le Pitture della Nuova Catacomba di Via Latina (Rome, 1960). There is also a color plate in A. Grabar, The Beginnings of Christian Art (Thames and Hudson, 1967), pl. 254.

²Text in G.C.S. 7, pp. 99-101.

³G.C.S. 6, pp. 231-232.

⁴E. Mader published a two volume condensed version of the 1926-28 expedition. Cf. Evaristus Mader, Mambre (Frei-

Opinions vary as to the Emperor's motive for building this shrine. G. Armstrong reminds us that church building was a meritorious act of philanthropy expected of the wealthy in the ancient Byzantine world.¹ Further, Constantine himself stressed the this-worldly aspects of the Christian faith and he may have wished to embody the emerging alliance of church and empire with these Holy Land shrines. W. Telfer² postulates that Constantine may have wished to foster unity among Christians by enabling Holy Land pilgrimages to take place. There may also have been a desire on his part to function independently of Rome. Massey H. Shepherd³ points out that Constantine's deepest grasp of the Christian faith was in terms of theophania rather than of parousia. He goes so far as to suggest that Constantine's interest in theophanies may have stemmed from his own experience on the eve of the Ponte Milvio.

From the fifth century, there is extant a bold mosaic

burg: Wewel Verlag, 1957). Vol. 2, figs. 40a and 47a are diagrams of the floor plan. Fig. 38 of the same volume shows an artist's conception of the original shrine. The basilica was 66 x 54 feet set within a 160 x 214 feet courtyard, and was built around 333 A.D. The Madaba mosaic map of the late seventh century depicts schematically a church and tree at Mamre.

¹"Imperial Church Building in the Holy Land in the Fourth Century," Biblical Archaeologist 30 (1967), 90-102.

²"Constantine's Holy Land Plan," Studia Patristica, vol. 1 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1957), 696-700.

³"Liturgical Expressions of the Constantinian Triumph," Dunbarton Oaks Papers, 21 (Washington, D.C., 1967), 59-78.

in the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome.¹ This mosaic, which is under an upper level window, is subdivided into three sections. Across the upper area we see Abraham bowing to three young men with halos; the central figure is also outlined with a mandorla. On the lower left we see Sarah preparing three round loaves of bread at a worktable and Abraham extending his right hand in a blessing over the bread (the last two fingers of the hand are clenched). To the right we see the three men seated at a table with the bread on it. Abraham is presenting them a platter, which holds an entire miniature calf. In this lower right scene the central guest does not have the mandorla. In front of the table one can see a wine jug (mostly restoration).²

¹The most complete list of ancient Christian art work by theme which I used is Louis Reau's Iconographie de L'Art Chrétienne, 6 vols. (Paris, 1955). Vol. 2.1 concerns Old Testament themes and deals with Mamre on pp. 19-20 and 131-132. Unfortunately Reau does not provide research information for the art works he lists. His first entry for Mamre is the Maria Maggiore mosaic.

Color plates of this can be found in Die Römischen Mosaiken der Kirchlichen Bauten vom IV-XIII Jahrhundert, Walter N. Schumacher, ed. (Herder, 1976). This is a revision of Joseph Wilpert, Die Römischen Mosaiken und Malereien der Kirchlichen Bauten, 4 vols. (1916). See pl. 29. Or see A. Grabar, Early Medieval Painting from the Fourth to the Eleventh Century (Skira, 1957), p. 37. There is a black and white print in Goodenough, vol. 3, fig. 1.

I am told that the best source of information on early Christian art in this country is the Index of Christian Art, housed at Princeton University. The Index, which I have not been able to consult, is a card catalogue, with multiple cross-referencing, of published reproductions of individual works of art.

²J. J. Tikkanen in Die Genesismosaiken von S. Marco in Venedig (Helsinki, 1889), argues for a relationship between a

The sixth century Church of San Vitale in Ravenna has a much larger mosaic on the north wall of the sanctuary which depicts the Mamre scene.¹ Here three men with halos are seated at a table holding three quarter-creased round loaves, and Abraham serves them a miniature calf on a platter. Sarah is also present. The right third of this mosaic space contains a depiction of Abraham sacrificing Isaac.

On the opposite sanctuary wall there are representations of Abel and his offerings and of Melchisedech with his bread, wine, and a table. The two mosaic panels taken together, and in relation to the main altar in the church, carry

thirteenth century mosaic in the atrium of St. Mark's and fragments of the Cotton Bible. The bible, described by Reau as a Byzantine work of the fifth century, has been severely damaged by fire. The fragment relating to the Mamre story shows three winged haloed angels seated at a round table with two items on it. In the background is a tent. Sarah watches from the tent doorway, which can be seen above the halo of the central figure (Plates 11, 79 and 13, 96).

The later Venetian mosaic has two scenes. On the left three winged haloed angels carrying staves stand before Abraham. He is on his knees near the central angel. In the scene on the right the three angels are seated in front of a tent at a squarish table which supports two loaves, two knives, and a chalice. Sarah watches from the tent doorway, which can be seen above the halo of the central figure (Plate 6, 40).

¹There are color detail plates in G. Bovini's Ravenna (New York: Abrams, 1972), pls. 78-79. A floor plan of the church can be found on p. 111. There is a black and white print in Goodenough, vol. 11, fig. 100. An excellent black and white photographic treatment of the entire church can be had in Bovini's San Vitale, Ravenna, Basil Taylor, trans., 3rd ed. (Milan: Silvano, 1957).

the theme of eucharistic sacrifice.¹ Abraham is a type of Jesus in his placing of bread and wine upon a table. His act of blessing the bread in the Maria Maggiore panel may have been intended to convey a similar impression. We found no such allusions to the eucharistic liturgy in our written sources.

The next extant Mamre art works are from the eleventh or twelfth centuries, according to Reau, and are therefore beyond the scope of our paper.²

¹So Gutmann, pp. 146-147. The depictions of Abraham, Abel, and Melchisedech naturally call to mind the commemorative paragraph of the old Roman eucharistic canon.

The nearby mosaics of Emperor Justinian and Empress Theodora, in which they are leading offertory processions, can be understood to set up the royal couple as types of the Church.

²Some of Reau's remarks about later Western art works lead one to believe that several of these are full of details from the story. On the other hand it is fairly clear that in the East artists preferred to concentrate upon the three angels as a symbol of the Trinity. Goodenough has black and white reproductions (vol. 11, figs. 264-266) of later manuscript illuminations. Number 264, from Codex Vat. Gr. 747, p. 39a, depicts Abraham kissing the foot of one of three haloed men. Number 266, from the same page of the same eleventh century manuscript, depicts three haloed men, of whom the middle figure has a cruciform halo. Sarah watches from a window as he serves them food at a round table. Number 265, from the Constantinople Octateuch, shows three winged, haloed angels at a table set with three chalices. Sarah watches Abraham from a window as he serves the guests. This is only the second example of the guests having wings in our sampling (the other was the Cotton Bible fragment).

Perhaps the most famous Byzantine representation of the Mamre angels as a symbol of the Trinity is the icon by Andrew Rublev (Tretiakov gallery, Moscow) done in the early fifteenth century. Here we have three winged, haloed angels seated at a table on which is one chalice. Abraham and Sarah are not included in this scene. As described by Leon Ouspensky and Vladimir Lossky in The Meaning of Icons (Graf, Olten-Switzerland, 1952), pp. 201-206 (color plate p. 200), the

In conclusion, I want to take a stand on just one aspect of the Via Latina mural and the mosaics in Maria Maggiore and San Vitale. I think these three works should be considered as possible symbolic representations of the entire Trinity, with Jesus as the central figure.

These artists subtly take advantage of the ambiguity of the biblical account. The three visitors are equal in some respects, such as age, appearance, dress, and halos (often used). Yet one of the three can seem to be set off by his stature, location, gesture, or, as at Santa Maria Maggiore, by a mandorla (in one of the two scenes). Except for this last case, the other ways of setting off a chief visitor can hardly be said to be clear indicators of mere angelic status for the two remaining figures.¹

Just as the energies of Christian commentators focused

three angels symbolize, from left to right, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Later imitations of Rublev's Trinity sometimes depict three chalices and some token food items (e.g., three fist-sized radishes) in what is otherwise substantially the same scenario.

In the West the baptism of Jesus by John eventually became the usual biblical scene for Trinitarian iconography, while the theophany at Mamre remained the locus for Byzantine Trinitarian iconography.

¹L. Thunberg has reviewed a great many Patristic sources on Mamre in his article "Early Christian Interpretations of the Three Angels in Gen. 18," Texte und Untersuchungen, vol. 92, pp. 560-570. He concludes that we should always assume Christ to be the central figure, if any of the visitors are to be taken symbolically. He also points out that Western iconographic material on Mamre with a "clear Trinitarian arrangement" comes much later than clear Trinitarian written material on the same passage.

primarily on theological and spiritual levels of meaning in the Mamre story, so also early Christian art is primarily interested in the divine. One looks in vain for artistic scenes wherein Sarah prepares really large quantities of bread, milk, and the other dairy products. The only calf of decent size is in the Via Latina panel. There are no extant art examples of any members of Abraham's household being involved in the event. The footwashing could well have been a worthwhile subject for some artisan or patron.

Conclusions to Chapter II

Let us review the Patristic commentary on Mamre in light of the eight guidelines which we established at the beginning of this chapter.

1. We proposed that Old Testament events acquired significance for early Christians in relation to, or as foreshadowings of, Christ's later accomplishments. Most of the Fathers up to Jerome considered the theophany at Mamre as an activity of Jesus. Given the brevity of many of their comments on this specific biblical passage, it is fair to suppose that for many of them the Mamre story had no other major significance.

2. We assumed that the literary contexts of an Old Testament passage need not be as important to the Fathers as typological considerations of it. Indeed, few Christian authors showed much interest in the Mamre story's immediate

literary context. Chrysostom spoke favorably of Abraham's acceptance of circumcision as being the reason for the theophany. Bede mentioned Mamre as being an ally of Abraham. The Emperor Constantine, and his biographer Eusebius, were the only ones to concern themselves with the actual site in the Holy Land. Ambrose and a few others contrasted Abraham's virtue with the sinfulness of Sodom. Chrysostom, Jerome, and Augustine tried to contextually explain Sarah's laughter. Augustine's remark on Abraham's physical state, while speculative, is another rare example of Christian interest in the context.

3. In addition to looking for types and allegories which related Old Testament passages to the life of Christ, we also planned to look for ones which helped to explain the life of the Church. In fact some of the Mamre commentary was directed toward Church life. Origen saw his theory of Reserve reflected in Abraham and Lot. Gregory of Illiberia and Isadore of Seville made many ecclesial allegories on the passage, some of which were unfortunately very anti-Jewish. Some of Bede's remarks were also exhortatory.

The outstanding commentators on how the Church should respond to Abraham's example at Mamre were certainly John Chrysostom and Ambrose. Their call to almsgiving was deeply personal and inspiring, even though we do not hold today that the three visitors were necessarily poor.

4. We expected the early Fathers to mix together his-

torical types, sermon illustrations types, and allegories. Given the Patristic tendency to search for types in the Old Testament, it is surprising that parallels were not drawn between the meal at Mamre and later meals of Jesus during his earthly life. Irenaeus, Tertullian, Novatian, Cyril of Jerusalem, and Bede made very brief observations as to Christ's future dealings with men, including his eating with them. Novatian, Origen, and Ambrose mentioned Christ's washing of feet at the Last Supper. In the latter set of remarks Novatian is outstanding. After him none of the Fathers ever hinted that Christ at the Mandatum was repaying the descendants of Abraham in any way. Nor do we find the Mandatum related to the Mamre foot washing in art works.

As we saw in the Excursus, the mosaic at San Vitale (and possibly the one at Maria Maggiore) had eucharistic overtones to it. This similarity or type is not present in our written sources, unless one wishes to argue over context in the work of Cyril of Jerusalem.¹

5. We held that Philo's allegories were frequently imitated by Christian writers. This was clearly the case with the Mamre story. Origen and Ambrose were the two leading imitators.

6. We anticipated differences in interpretation be-

¹Reau has a list of Patristic Old Testament types in vol. 1, pp. 201-207. If his list is an accurate approximation of Patristic written traditions, then clearly only some of the many possible Old Testament types were fostered.

tween the Alexandrian and Antiochean schools. The Antiochean Fathers clearly avoided allegory on our passage. Chrysostom's interest in Abraham's hospitality in all its ramifications, down to how fast the bread could be baked, was very unlike the majority of Patristic material on Mamre. Some writers, such as Jerome, avoided allegory and typology part of the time.

7. We mentioned that, of the three patriarchs, Abraham was rarely seen as a type of Jesus. In the ancient Christian understanding of the Mamre account this proved to be the case. For some, he and Sarah functioned as representatives of mankind, or at least of believers. For Zeno they were models of faith in God's promise concerning Isaac. For Chrysostom and Ambrose they were models of hospitality qua charity. But these are not types involving Jesus as such. We saw in guideline number four above how little development there was of any Last Supper or Mandatum motifs, which would have involved Abraham as a type.

8. We assumed that biblical passages served as proofs in discussions of other doctrines or aspects of theology as well as of those directly involving Christ. There were obviously doctrinal uses made of the Mamre passage. For several reasons many Fathers saw Jesus as divine and preexistent at Mamre. Thus the later Incarnation of Jesus was a reasonable act of divine love. The Church's continuing conflict with Arianism eventually led to a deemphasis on any biblical inter-

pretations which could cast doubt on the equality of Jesus with the Father.

Other writers used Mamre in discussions on the nature and role of angels.

The explanation of the visit as Trinitarian grew from being a minor allegory in Origen through Augustine's full and free theophany to become the dominant opinion of the Eastern and Western churches into the Middle Ages.

As with the first guideline, here also it seems clear that Patristic preoccupation with angelology, Christology, or Trinitarian theology diverted energies which might have been put to better use in analyzing this story as part of Abrahamic and Genesis cycles.

Turning to the hermeneutical modes and rules mentioned by James Sanders at the beginning of this dissertation, we find that the Christian material follows the same general tendencies as does the Jewish material.

We were able to find a few instances in the Rabbinic writings where the human faults and weaknesses of Abraham and Sarah were mentioned, but there were not many such cases. In the Christian and Alexandrian Jewish commentary Sarah's faults received some attention, but Abraham seems to constantly have been a model of great faith--whether in Philo's De Abraham 118 or in Origen's Genesis Homily 4, 3 or in Chrysostom's Homily 41 in Genesim 378 or elsewhere. Thus the theologizing hermeneutic spoken of by Sanders was largely absent.

Rather, much of the material studied in this chapter can properly be said to draw lessons for the reflection or for the faith of the audiences. It was a moralizing method of hermeneutic.

Given the Christian and Alexandrian Jewish interest in theophany and in the use of different sorts of typology and allegory, the majority of the resulting commentary was supportative or constitutive,¹ as was the quite different Rabbinic commentary. The only major exception to this was the use made of the Mamre account by Chrysostom and Ambrose. These two bishops often challenged their urban congregations to assist in alleviating the very real poverty and destitution to be found in their cities.

¹I am assuming that any use of the Mamre material as proof texts for doctrinal statements about Jesus, the Trinity, angels and the like was a constitutive use in the sense that the usual audience for such "proofs" is the faithful, and not the heretics, schismatics, Jews, or pagans to whom it was often technically addressed.

CHAPTER III

EARLY JEWISH HERMENEUTIC OF GENESIS 32, 23-33

The Massoretic Text of the Jabbok story presents relatively few difficulties.¹ The opponent, who first appears in v. 25, is called simply a man and is never more clearly identified. The most difficult section is v. 29. שָׁרִיק (from שָׁרָה) is used only here and in Hosea 12, 4-5.² Here it has two objects, אֱלֹהִים and אֲנָשִׁים.³ The final word in this verse (וְהוֹכֵל) refers to both objects.⁴ The form פְּנִיָּאל of v. 31 is a variation of the more common פְּנוּאֵל of v. 32. The yod may have been used to relate the name in v. 31 more clearly to the phrase פְּנִים אֶל-פְּנִים.

¹Editions of the LXX and most English bibles count 32 verses in this chapter of Genesis, while the Hebrew enumeration includes the last verse of the preceding chapter. I will use the Hebrew verse numbers through the entire chapter for the sake of consistency.

²The English v. 1 of Hosea 12 combines vv. 1 and 2 of the Hebrew. Therefore the English verse numbers are one less than the Hebrew for the verses we are considering.

As an etymology for the name Israel, the saying "you have striven with God" is not in the expected form; God is normally the subject of such a verb.

³Speiser and the NAB render the former as "divine beings," instead of "God." The NAB translates the same word as "God" in Hosea 12, 4.

⁴The Preliminary Report on the Pentateuch retains וְהוֹכֵל as a *lectio difficilior*.

At this point we shall review the work of a representative number of twentieth century scholars to see whether they exhibit common areas of interest.¹

Some commentators endeavor to put the Jabbok story in its proper relationship to the larger series of Jacob traditions. Such efforts usually serve to anchor later remarks about the effect of the event upon Jacob. Most scholars of non-Jewish background seem to be willing to consider the Jabbok event as a genuine theophany,² while Jewish scholars

¹The following studies on the Jabbok story are listed in chronological order, except for the later work of Vawter which is placed with his first entry. Those commentaries already mentioned in the introduction to the first chapter are cited here only by the name of the author, when that is sufficient.

Gunkel, pp. 359-365; Skinner, pp. 407-412; Morgenstern, pp. 252-257; Benno Jacob, pp. 637-644 and 1003-1006 in the German original; Jacob's book in English, pp. 221-225; Interpreter's Bible commentary by Simpson, pp. 722-729; Karl Elliger, "Der Jakobs Kampf am Jabbok" Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche 48 (1951), pp. 1-31; J. Schildenberger, "Jakobs Nächtlicher Kampf mit dem Elohim am Jabok" Miscellanea Biblica B. Ubach (Barcelona, 1953), pp. 69-96; G. von Rad, pp. 314-321; Bruce Vawter, A Path through Genesis, pp. 223-224, and his On Genesis: A New Reading, pp. 347-351; F. Van Trigt, "La Signification de la Lutte de Jacob pres du Yabboq" Oudtestamentische Studien 12 (1958), pp. 280-309; Speiser, pp. 253-257; Nahum Sarna, Understanding Genesis (Schocken, 1966), pp. 203-206; Gaster, pp. 205-212; and R. Barthes, R. Martin-Achard, et al., Analyse Structurale et Exégèse Biblique (Neuchâtel: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1971), pp. 21-56.

²For example, G. von Rad argues that the Jahwist consciously wrote about a theophany in this passage (p. 319 of his Genesis). He holds for this interpretation consistently (pp. 319-320 of Genesis; vol. 1, pp. 110, 171-172, and 182 and vol. 2, pp. 325-326; and 378 of Old Testament Theology, D. Stalker, trans. (Harper and Row, 1962-1965). K. Kuntz in The Self-Revelation of God also concludes that the mysterious opponent is most likely Jahweh (pp. 105, 109, and esp. 128-132).

are much more inclined to consider the opponent to be merely an angel.¹

A good deal of the effort of recent scholars has been centered on various supposed elements of the pre-literary Jabbok traditions. Thus, some examine geographical inconsistencies in the account, possible alternate sequences in the roles and fortunes of the two wrestlers, or pagan dawn-spirit or river-spirit parallels to the mysterious opponent. Other topics frequently discussed include possible earlier etymologies for the name Israel, remote origins behind the prohibition against eating the thigh nerve, and possible origins for the place name Penuel.

While there is a relative amount of agreement on many of these pre-literary elements, other aspects of the story have proven to be more difficult. There are at least four different current proposals as to the nature of the blessing received by Jacob: that it is the name itself or the promise of it; that it is a legitimization or a confirmation of the

¹Speiser's translation of אלהים as "divine beings" assists him in avoiding a discussion of whether or not the Jabbok account was intended to be a theophany. Similarly, at the end of v. 30, it is mentioned that the opponent finally blessed Jacob. Speiser, citing Gen. 44, 7 (a greeting) and Gen. 47, 10 (a farewell), prefers to translate that the opponent "bade him goodbye." Speiser argues that the blessing which Jacob sought had already been given in the change of his name, and that greeting and farewell formulae would normally include an invocation of the good will of the deity. Speiser's suggestion, not noted by any of the ancient Rabbis, also supports the interpretation that the opponent was an angel.

blessing of Isaac; that it is a sharing in some sense in divine vitality; or that it is the wound itself and the effect it has on Esau. The few who comment on Jacob's question to the angel in v. 30 disagree as to its import. For example, von Rad looks upon it as a primitive boldness on Jacob's part with regard to what is holy, while Benno Jacob sees it as an indication that Jacob wished to be able to send the man a gift when the promise would later come true (cf. Judges, 13, 17).

There are two basic opinions as to the main theme of the story. Some commentators are impressed by the psychological and moral struggles which Jacob experienced at Jabbok. They see him as being a better man afterwards. On the other hand, many scholars find little evidence of Jacob's inner conversion. For these the two principal lessons are the initiative of God throughout this entire encounter and the mix of human qualities of Jacob precisely as our ancestor in faith. Morgenstern and von Rad respectively can serve as representatives of the two camps.

Benno Jacob's remarks on our passage are a fascinating amalgam of the two schools of thought just mentioned. He also dwells extensively on Esau's later reactions at his meeting with Jacob, and on the justice of Esau's grievances. His reflections on the way in which we should model our lives on that of our ancestor Jacob are perhaps best summarized by saying that we must fight for God with God's help.

Recent analysis of the Jabbok story, then, has not

come to as much of a degree of consensus as has recent scholarship on Mamre, but the general outlines are clear. I would recommend von Rad's and Elliger's presentations as very comprehensive. As with the Mamre commentary, none of the writers mentioned presents a systematic description of the history of ancient Jewish or Christian hermeneutic of the Jabbok passage.

We turn now to the principal Jewish versions and Targums and their treatment of our passage.¹ A synopsis and chart of the variations and patterns follow, and a more detailed description of the individual texts may be found in Appendix Two.

Some Targums supply the expected definite article on the הַ of v. 23, though its omission in the MT is of little consequence.² Several Targums explain in v. 24 that Jacob took across everything that he had.³

Many Targums take the wrestler to be an angel; some even identify him as Michael or Sariel. Many of the Targums record a dialogue in v. 27 wherein the angel explains that he must leave at dawn in order to join the choir of praising

¹In addition to the Targums cited in Chapter I of this paper, we have a section on part of the Jabbok story in the Cairo Genizah Targum fragments.

²Massorah Gedolah, Gerard Weil, ed. (Rome: P.I.B., 1971), 217 indicates three other biblical cases where an expected definite article is lacking.

³The U.B.S. Preliminary Report retains the MT as a *lectio difficilior*. The committee sees the addition of כָּל as a device which merely facilitates the setting of the scene. The passage thus concentrates on the two wrestlers to the exclusion of any relative or possession of Jacob.

angels in heaven. Jacob's remark in v. 31, that he had seen God face to face, is modified in several Targums to refer to an angel or angels.

The mysterious opponent's explanation of the name Israel in v. 29 is frequently changed. Some Targums refer to angels rather than to God; one refers to angels and drops the reference to men; and the Peshitta speaks of one angel and one man. The LXX separates the two objects by means of the two verbs. Some LXX manuscripts even add a future sense to the latter part with "you will be strong with men."

The two spellings, Peniel and Penuel, evoke no speculation. The versions and Targums either retain the MT sequence, or spell both as Peniel or Penuel without comment.

Three additional traditions are to be found only in Targum Ps.-Jonathan. There is an incident in v. 25 wherein Michael challenges Jacob to tithe from his goods and from his children. Levi is selected for special duties as a result of this tithe. In v. 32 the sunrise is held to be earlier than usual, and reference is made to the sunset of the day when Jacob had left Beersheba. That sunset had been later than usual. Thirdly, in v. 33 Ps.-Jonathan speaks of the nerve in cattle and wild animals, as well as in Jacob's right thigh.

Other Rabbinic Traditions on Genesis 32, 23-33

Major Rabbinic writings on the Jabbok story include Genesis Rabbah 77-78 and Canticles Rabbah 3, 5-6. I have as-

sembled the Rabbinic material into ten groupings, starting each time with these two sources and then presenting related material. After the last grouping (on the nerve prohibition), five more sources will be studied individually.

1. Dinah

The mention of Jacob sending across his wives and sons prompts an inquiry as to the whereabouts of Dinah.¹ She was hidden by Jacob in a chest to keep her from Esau. There is a question as to whether Esau might have turned out to be a better man if he had been allowed to marry Dinah.

2. Jacob the Ferryman

The Jabbok current is strong and difficult to cross. Jacob took his family and possessions across by boat. Indeed, he himself acted as ferry(man) (גשר), taking them from one side to the other.²

3. Jacob alone

The Rabbis dwelt often on the fact that Jacob was by himself when the trial came at Jabbok. Gen. Rab. 77, 1 cites Deut. 33, 26, "There is none like God, Oh Jeshurun." Jeshurun means the finest and most praiseworthy among you. In fact, you will find that all which God plans to do in the time to come He has anticipated and done by means of holy people in this world. Thus God will raise the dead, make rain to cease,

¹Gen. Rab. 76, 9.

²Ibid.

In this chart a capital X indicates the presence of the topic in question. A small x indicates that the source can be taken as a partial witness, or that inferences can be reasonably drawn from its context.

	LXX	Neof.	Frag.	Cairo	Onk.	Ps.J.	Pesh.	Sam. P.	Sam. T.
Def. art. with מן of v. 23.	X			X				X	X
Assition of <u>all</u> in v. 24.	X			X			X	X	X
Opponent is an angel. Name is included where found.	X		x	X	x	X			
		Sariel				Michael			
Dialogue in v. 27 about angelic choir.		X	X	X		X			
Explanation of name Israel is modified.	X	X		X	X	X	X		X
V. 31 is modified about seeing God.		X			X	X	X		
MT Peniel/Penuel se- quence is maintained.	X				X	X			
Peniel is in both verses.		X							
Penuel is in both verses.							X	X	X

and so on, as Elijah raised the dead, made rain to cease, and so on. Israel is another such holy person; at Jabbok he was left alone, and so also we read in Isaia 2, 11, "The Lord alone will be exalted on that day."

There are several short remarks on the solitary figure of Jacob to be found in Ozar Midrashim.¹ Jacob is "alone" in God's favor; He says, "I put My name on Abraham and Isaac, and again on you will I confer it; from now and forever I confer My name because of Jacob's strength." Another possibility was that Jacob was "alone" in a hiding place (cave?) with his ancestors. In another sense, he was "alone" in righteousness. Indeed, his children are a "people dwelling alone."² Another tradition is that the Lord is often "alone."³

Another Scriptural verse which reminds us of Jacob at the Jabbok is Isaia 40, 31, "They who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength."⁴

3A. Jacob the Self-reliant

The main Canticles Rabbah commentary was initiated by Cant. 3, 6, "What is coming . . . with all the fragrant powders (קטנים) of the merchant?" In contrast to Abraham and

¹Page 244, right col., sect. 23.

²Numbers 23, 9.

³Here are cited Isaia 2, 11 (mentioned in the preceding paragraph of this paper) and Deut. 32, 12, "The Lord alone did lead him."

⁴Yalkut, Isaia 447 mentions this.

Isaac, Jacob was the more self-sufficient. Indeed, his business success came from the dust under his feet. In fact, all the business success with which Israel prospers in this world is due to the merit of the dust of Jacob our father.¹ That dust was taken by God and put under the throne of His glory, as it says in Nahum 1, 3, ". . . and the clouds are the dust of His feet."²

4. The Encounter

There are several traditions concerning the opponent of Jacob. One³ is that the angel came in the form of a shepherd, with flocks of sheep and camels. He and Jacob agreed to each take their own animals across the river. Jacob took his flock across and then returned to see if he had left anything behind.⁴ It was on Jacob's return that the wrestling took place.⁵

¹In succeeding formulae credit is given to the merit of the dust of Jacob for Israel's success in trade, wars, and Torah.

²While none of these allusions in Cant. Rab. may seem to be directly connected to the Jabbok incident, we assume that the dust of the wrestling match is the connecting link in these traditions because of the mention of wars, the citation of Nahum 1, 3 (which will be more clearly used later in this paper, in Hullin 91a), and because of the immediately subsequent remarks in Cant. Rab.

The same verse from Canticles and citations of Gen. 32, 25 ff. can be found in Yalkut, Deut. 890 and Yalkut, Cant. 986.

³Gen. Rab. 77, 2.

⁴Such "double-checking" is praiseworthy; an example is given of a Rabbi-trader who checked his supplies on a journey and found that he had left a bolt of silk behind at an inn.

⁵Much the same tradition is found in Cant. Rab. 3, 6.

Another tradition is that the angel came as a robber chieftain with flocks.¹ He encouraged Jacob to cooperate in moving their combined cattle. He himself took across all of Jacob's flocks in the wink of an eye; Jacob then had to make several trips to move the robber chieftain's flocks. Eventually Jacob became suspicious at the need for more trips, and he called the man a sorcerer. He took a clump of wool and stuffed it in the robber's throat and called him a sorcerer again, saying "Witchcraft is not allowed to succeed at night."² The angel decided to let Jacob know with whom he was involved. He touched the ground and fire shot forth. Jacob was not afraid; he said that he was made of fire himself, as it is written in Obadiah 1, 18, "The house of Jacob shall be a fire."³

¹Gen. Rab. 77, 2.

²L. Ginzberg (The Legends of the Jews, 6 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1909-1938), n. 247 on p. 305 of vol. 5) notes that magic usually does prevail at night; the words of Jacob attest to his courage.

³Jacob Mann, The Bible as Read and Preached in the Old Synagogue, pp. 260-269, reconstructs the Seder containing the Jabbok account as including Gen. 32, 4-33, 17. There were three different Haftarothe. One older one was Joel 4, 13-21 and Amos 1, 11-12; a local selection which held for some time in Palestine was Isaiah 21, 11-17 and 22, 21-23. The third Haftarah, which eventually became dominant, consisted of Ch. 1 of Obadiah, perhaps vv. 1-9 and 21. With the exception of the Obadiah 1, 18 citation, I have found no other citations from Mann's Haftarothe in the materials for this paper.

A very similar account can be found in Cant. Rab. 3, 6. There Jacob takes a woollen rope and winds it around the angel's neck; later the angel causes fire to shoot forth from a rock.

Another tradition is that it was Esau's guardian angel who wrestled with Jacob.¹ We know this from Jacob's remark to Esau in Gen. 33, 10, ". . . to see your face is like seeing the face of אלהים." Here the commentator wishes us to understand אלהים not as God but as an angel, specifically Esau's guardian.

Cant. Rab. has roughly the same exegesis. The angel is the guardian of the wicked Esau, and the import of Jacob's plea in Gen. 33, 10 is that Esau's face resembles his guardian's face. Because Jacob wrestled so well with Esau's angel, in the future, when other nations come to attack Israel, God will say to them, "Your angel could not stand up to their father Jacob; shall you overpower them?"

In Tanhuma B² we have a compound scene. Four bands of angels were sent to keep Esau occupied that night. The first band said, "We are sons of Isaac," and Esau fought them furiously. The second band said, "We are sons of the son of Abraham," and Esau also fought them. The remaining bands then said, "We are brothers of Jacob," and on account of Jacob they were not opposed by Esau. Meanwhile, Jacob was by himself; he did not know what trials the Lord had in mind for him. He was very afraid of Esau. God sent Michael in the form of a shepherd to have a contest with Jacob, in order to ease his fear.

¹Gen. Rab. 77, 3.

²ר"ש 7-8.

Eventually Jacob escaped from Michael. The whole trial was meant to encourage Jacob.

The fact that Jacob was involved in a contest which lasted all night should teach us not to go out at night.¹

5. Jacob is wounded

In the opening words of Gen. 32, 26, "He saw² that he could not overcome him," we do not know who is who. Gen. Rab. 77, 3 says that the angel, who at that point was covered with dust, was the one who could not prevail. Jacob is characterized as one who came against his opponent with five "amulets"; these were his own merit and the merits of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca. God remarked to the angel, "You cannot even prevail over his own merit!"³

¹Yalkut, Ruth 604.

²In Lamentations Rabbah (on Lam. 5, 1, "Oh, Lord, look and see [חֲבִיט לְרֵאָה] ") there are remarks on semantic differences between נֹחַם and רָאָה. One nuance mentioned is that רָאָה means to look from nearby, as we have it used in Gen. 32, 26.

³In the same way, when other nations in the future move against Israel, God will say to them, "Your angel was not able to prevail over Israel, and you all the less."

A similar tradition can be found in Cant. Rab. 3, 6. God says to Esau's angel, "Jacob comes at you with five amulets in his hand. Compare yourself with him; you cannot stand up to his merit alone."

In Antiquities 1, 20, 2 Josephus treats the Jabbok incident; we will summarize his work here.

Jacob wrestled with a ghost (φαντάσμα) who had started the fight. When he won the match, Jacob realized that his opponent was an angel; Jacob asked the angel what his lot in life would be. The angel told him to rejoice for having conquered an angel of God, and that his victory was an omen of good things to come. His people

Another opinion offered in Cant. Rab. 3, 6 is that Esau's angel saw the Shekinah standing over Jacob. When he saw the Shekinah, he knew that he could not win, and so he surrendered to Jacob.¹

The injury inflicted by the angel is a mysterious one. Gen. Rab. 77, 3 suggests that the angel "touched" the holy ones who were destined to come from Jacob, i.e., the generation of persecution.²

The verb וּפָנָה in v. 26 is given some further explanation in Gen. Rab. 77, 3. It could mean that the angel flattened the bulge of the thigh, or that he split the muscle as one splits a fish, or that he moved it aside. This last possibility finds some support from a phrase in Ezekiel 23, 18, "my soul turned (וּפָנָה) from her."³

The contest lasted all night. Gen. Rab. 77, 3 notes that "the two of them kept struggling all that night, one on top of the other; the shield of one at the shield of the other."

would never be abandoned or become extinct; he himself would never meet a stronger man. The angel named him Israel, meaning an opponent of an angel of God.

¹This is the sole reference to the Shekinah being at Jabbok which I have found in the Rabbinic material.

²Cant. Rab. has the same tradition. Rabbinic usage normally equated the generation of persecution with the victims of Hadrian's violences.

³Cant. Rab. 3, 6 offers the first two meanings and cites Ezekiel 23, 17, "she removed (וּפָנָה) her soul from them," to advance the meaning that the angel could have pulled the muscle out from its place.

6. The Opponent asks for his Release

The angel's request to be released and Jacob's bold refusal to do so offer opportunities for Rabbinic development. In Cant. Rab. we are reminded that up to this point in the story the reader is not sure who is in control of whom, but v. 27 indicates that it was the angel, who had to go at dawn to sing praises to God, who was losing the contest.¹

In Gen. Rab. 78, 1 the nature of angels is dealt with. Citing Lamentations 3, 23, "God's mercies are new every morning," the theory is advanced that heavenly angels do not praise a second time. Every day God creates a new band of angels and they sing a new song and then depart. An obvious objection to this theory is that the angel who wrestled with Jacob was not new that morning after the match. The reply is that this was a chief angel such as Michael or Gabriel, and chief angels do not depart or get replaced.²

Gen. Rab. 78, 2 continues by recalling that Jacob was not impressed with his opponent's need to sing. He told the angel that the choir would not miss one singer; then Jacob

¹So also in Psalms Rabbah 91, 6 (on Ps. 91, 11) the question is "who is greater: the dismitter or the one dismissed?" The dismitter is greater, as was Jacob in Gen. 32, 27. A similar brief remark on Ps. 91, 11 can be found in Yalkut, Psalms 843. There the question is who is greater: the sender or the one sent.

²Angels who depart go back to their source, which is the river of fire. This river comes from the sweat produced by the living beings who carry God's throne. A parallel development initiated by Lam. 3, 23 can be found in Lamentations Rabbah 3, 8.

said, "Those angels who came to Abraham did not go away from him until they had blessed him." The angel replied, "They were sent to do that; I was not."¹

Another objection was brought up by the angel. He said, "Because the ministering angels revealed the mysteries of God, they were exiled from their regions for 138 years. Shall I heed you and be exiled from my region?"²

Finally, the angel told Jacob "In the future God will appear to you at Bethel and He will change your name; I will be standing there also."³

7. The New Name and its Meaning

Gen. Rab. 78, 3 addresses itself to the problem that, after receiving the new name of Israel, the patriarch is often called Jacob in other places in the Bible. One opinion put forward is that the name Jacob was not to be abolished entirely but would have a second place to Israel. The opposite opinion is also mentioned, namely that the name Jacob should

¹This was also mentioned in grouping 11 of Ch. I of this paper.

²This is in reference to a Rabbinic tradition (Gen. Rab. 50, 9 and 68, 12) that the angels should not have revealed in Gen. 19, 13 that they were "about to destroy this place." They were not sent on another mission until Jacob's ladder dream, calculated as taking place 138 years later.

³The basis for the angel's promise to be present at Bethel can be found in the MT of Hosea 12, 5, "and there God spoke with us (עמנו)." Yalkut, Hosea 528.

This analysis of Hosea 12,5 can also be found in Yalkut, Hosea 528.

continue to dominate and the name Israel be second in use.¹

Another Scriptural passage often linked with Gen. 32, 29 is Isaia 44, 26, "The Lord confirms the word of his servant." The servant angel performed his task in renaming Jacob at the Jabbok, and the Lord confirmed that when He gave Jacob the name Israel in Gen. 35, 10.²

The phrase ". . . you have striven with God and with men, and you have prevailed," evokes only a few comments. Gen. Rab. 78, 3 takes אֱלֹהִים to mean gods (angels). The sense then is "you have striven with heavenly beings (הַעֲלִיּוֹנִים) and you have beaten them; with dwellers here below (הַתַּחְתּוֹנִים) and you have beaten them." The heavenly being³ was the angel--perhaps Esau's guardian angel.⁴ The earthly beings were Esau and his chiefs.

¹Both of these opinions are mentioned in Yalkut, Gen. 81. In Mekilta de Rab. Ishmael 16, and Yalkut, Exodus 217 the second opinion is favored. In Gen. Rab. 63, 3 and Yalkut, Gen. 110 the name change is mentioned without further comment.

²This theme can be found in Pesikta Rabbati 17, 2; Pesikta Rab. Kahana 7, 3; Tanhuma B. 17; some editions of Gen. Rab. 78, 3; and Gen. Rab. 82, 2. Gen. Rab. 82, 2 notes that the angel will be present at Bethel (Hosea 12, 5 עֲמֹן exegesis). Almost all of these sources note the latter part of Isaia 44, 26, ". . . The Lord says of Jerusalem, 'she shall be inhabited'." As God confirmed the angel's word to Jacob, how much the more will He confirm all the messages of hope about Jerusalem.

³Note the change to a single angel in this exegesis.

⁴When Jacob spoke to Esau in Gen. 33, 10 he was referring to Esau's angel (אֱלֹהִים), as we already saw in grouping 4 (Gen. Rab. 77, 3). Another way to understand Jacob's statement in Gen. 33, 10 is that he was saying to Esau, "As the

Yalkut, Hosea 528 (on Hosea 12, 5) mentions that Jacob prevailed over the angel, and that Jacob was beseeched and then blessed by the angel. The phrase from v. 29, "You have striven with gods and with men," is explained as referring to the Princes in Israel and the Rulers in exile in Babylon respectively.¹

According to Gen. Rab. 78, 3, an alternate Rabbinical understanding of שרית in v. 29 was to read שר אֱלֹהִים. The sense then is "You are a prince with God."²

In Mekilta Yohay יתרו 19, 3, Moses is compared to Jacob; Moses is also deemed worthy of "receiving" the great name Israel, for he also had "striven with God" in his lifetime.

8. The Opponent leaves

When Jacob asked the angel what his name was, his question was not answered. The Rabbis saw this reticence as part of the ordinary way in which angels act. In Gen. Rab. 78, 4, two Scriptural verses are cited: Psalm 147, 4, "God

face of God stands for judgement, so does your face stand for judgement." In the context of Gen. 33, this paraphrase speaks of God's (and Esau's) merciful judgement.

¹These terms, Prince and Ruler in exile, refer to the Jewish religious leaders in these two lands. The translation of אֱלֹהִים as "princes" can be grounded on Gen. 23, 6.

²The Gen. Rab. text explains this to mean, "you are he whose features are engraved in heaven above." This is based on a tradition, recorded in Gen. Rab. 68, 12, that the angels who went up and down the ladder had an image of Jacob's features at the top of the ladder, in heaven.

gives all the stars their names (שמות)," and Isaia 40, 26, "God calls them all by their name (בשם)." The change in number from שמות to שם implies a change in name. This teaches us that angels have no permanent names; their names may not be at a later time what they are now. Therefore, the angel who spoke to Jacob was reluctant to give his name. A similar case occurs in Judges 13, 18. There to Manoah's question the angel replied, "Why do you ask my name, seeing that it is wonderful (פלאי)?" By this answer the angel meant that he did not know if and when his name would be changed.¹

The blessing which the angel gives in v. 30 caused little comment from the Rabbis. It is usually numbered in a standard set of five blessings which Jacob received in his lifetime.²

9. The Sunrise

The rising of the sun upon Jacob became the focus of several traditions. Gen. Rab. 78, 5 says that the sun had healing effects upon Jacob, but only cast light for other people. In fact the sun healed Jacob but burned Esau and his men. God said to Jacob, "So shall your children gaze at the

¹In Tanhuma B וישלח 22 the Judges citation is repeated. We are also told that sometimes angels are made of wind (e.g., Psalm 104, 4) and sometimes they are made of lightning (e.g., Job 38, 35). Thus their names must be changed often.

²So Pesikta Rab. Kahana, on וזאת הברכה (Deut. 33, 1); Tanhuma and Tanhuma B, וברכה; and Yalkut, Deut. 950.

sun and it will heal them, and it will burn the nations." Malachi 3, 19-20¹ speaks of the bright day of the Lord which will burn evildoers and heal the just.²

In Gen. Rab. 68, 10, we read that, in Gen. 28, 11, God had caused the sun to set early.³ Thus Jacob "lost" some hours of daylight when he left the Holy Land. God "gave it back" to him when he reentered the Holy Land, in Gen. 32, 32. In all this Jacob is a sign to his children. They would later go into exile⁴ and later return.⁵

Jacob's limping is involved in a few traditions. In Gen. Rab. 79, 5 a story is told of a Rabbi who travelled to Rome and back. On his return trip he began to limp and another Rabbi said to him, "You resemble your ancestor (Jacob)."⁶

¹English, Malachi 4, 1-2.

²Gen. Rab. 79, 5 notes that, in Gen. 33, 18, Jacob is described as being sound of body (שׁוֹמֵר), whereas he had been lamed previously at Jabbok. The implication is that the healing effects of the sun had cured Jacob.

³This tradition depends on one appreciating the force of the perfect סָף as a completed action. In Gen. Rab. 68, 10 God causes the early sunset because He wishes to speak to Jacob in private. Later, in Gen. Rab. 69, further traditions are given that this place where Jacob rested for the night and had his dream was the site of the future Temple.

⁴E.g., Jeremiah 15, 9, ". . . her sun went down while it was yet day."

⁵E.g., Malachi 3, 20 (English 4, 2), "For you who fear My name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings."

Brief versions of this tradition can be found in Sanhedrin 95b; Yalkut, Gen. 107 and 118; Yalkut, Jeremiah 293; and Yalkut, Malachi 593. It was also in Targum Ps.-Jonathan.

⁶We must remember that Rome was symbolized by Esau in Rabbinic lore.

In Exodus Rabbah 30, 11 there is a parable about a king who "brings wood" near to a high official. The king stands for the all powerful God who "brought wood" near to Jacob, as a result of which Jacob limped.¹

10. The Sciatic Nerve Law

The word גיד in Rabbinic literature can mean a tendon, blood vessel, or a nerve.² Many translators also use the English "sinew" for it. The common understanding of the term גיד הנשה in this passage from Genesis is that it means the sciatic nerve. Since we have a fair amount of legal material about this regulation, I have divided it into three parts: the Mishnah, the Talmud, and other sources.³

10A. Mishnah Hullin

In the Mishnah, tractate Hullin, Ch. 7, we have six regulations dealing with the גיד הנשה. We shall briefly summarize them here.

Mishnah 1. The prohibition of the thigh nerve is operative inside and outside of Israel; before and after the destruction of the Temple; for sacrificial and

¹Commentators conjecture that "bringing wood" must be a reference to stocks or scourging or some such affliction involving wooden implements.

²S. Levin and E. Boyden, The Kosher Code of the Orthodox Jew, 1940, p. 184.

³In Jewish tradition there are two positive commands in the earlier portions of Genesis, namely Gen. 1, 22, "Be fruitful and multiply," and Gen. 17, 9-10, "Every male shall be circumcised." The first negative command in the Bible is Gen. 32, 33, "They do not eat the nerve." We will use Mishnayoth, 7 vols., P. Blackman, ed. (New York: Judaica Press, 1965).

table fare, whether wild or domestic; and for both thighs, right and left. It does not apply to birds, which have no נֶדֶה. It does apply to embryos (Rab. Judah denies this). Its fat is allowed to be eaten. Butchers can be trusted to remove the nerve properly (Rab. Meir denies this).

Mishnah 2. One may sell meat with the nerve not removed to a Gentile since the location of the nerve is well known. When removing the nerve, one should remove it completely. Rab. Judah says that one need only remove a symbolic part of it (a part adequate to fulfill the law about removing it).

Mishnah 3. If one eats an olive-sized portion of the nerve, he is liable for forty lashes; if he eats less, he is still guilty. If he eats an olive-sized portion from two thighs¹ he is liable for eighty lashes (Rab. Judah holds for only forty).

Mishnah 4. If one were to cook a thigh containing the nerve and the meat was affected by the nerve as to taste, then the leg is not to be eaten. In cases like this we should consider the leg meat as if it were made of turnips; i.e., the nerve would have to give a taste to a comparable amount of turnips. The Rabbinical custom is to assume that there must be sixty times as much bulk of meat as nerve in order to assume that a taste is not imparted.

Mishnah 5. If the sciatic nerve were cooked with other nerves, and was still distinguishable, it should be removed and the previous taste standard would then be applied. If it was not distinguishable, all the nerves should be removed and the previous taste standard applied.

Mishnah 6. The prohibition applies to clean animals but not to unclean ones. Rab. Judah extends it to unclean animals since the Genesis prohibition would have included all animals before the Judaic period (i.e., Sinai). Others reply that the law is from Sinai, but was written of in this place in Genesis to show the origin of the custom.

10B. Talmud Hullin

These six laws are greatly expanded on in the Babylo-

¹It is not clear if both thighs need be from the same animal.

nian Talmud, tractate Hullin, Ch. 7, pp. 89b ff. I will summarize these Talmud remarks here, noting the page on the left margin.

89b Mishnah 1

Dispute over the application of the law to unborn sacrificial animals. This is tied into the question of whether or not the sciatic nerve imparts a taste.

90a

Dispute continues, involving the question of the time needed for development of nerves in a foetus, and the fact that the law was binding on the sons of Noah (i.e., before Sinai). Attempt is made to restrict discussion to born animals. Distinction is then made between animals which will be offered and then eaten, and animals which will be entirely burnt. Several Rabbis dispute the application of the law in these ritual cases.

90b

Rab. Judah seems to be in favor of at least allowing the nerves to be burned in whole-burnt sacrifices. Discussion continues on disposition of sciatic nerves in various types of offerings. Rab. Judah says that only the right thigh of an animal must be stripped of its nerve (the custom is for one hip, and reason decides for the right hip). There follows a discussion on why Rab. Judah was so sure about this.

91a

There seem to be two nerves in question: one near the bone and one near the flesh.¹ There are fewer regulations concerning the latter. Dispute turns to whether there should be forty or eighty lashes for eating both sciatic nerves of a single animal. Further discussion on if two animals are involved. Rab. Judah consistently holds for the more lenient punishment.²

¹The Soncino Talmud edition postulates that these are probably the great sciatic nerve and the common peroneal nerve respectively.

²It is not clear in the Talmud exactly why Rab. Judah keeps calling for the minimum of observance (and of penalties) in regard to the sciatic nerve. Patte mentions takkanoth, which were mitigations or even abrogations of Pentateuchal laws (pp. 106-107). These takkanoth were employed when a law was too often transgressed. Perhaps Rab. Judah was aware of

He notes that the text in Gen. 32, 33 speaks of the leg, which must mean the stronger one; this would be the right one.

The Rabbis specify that the verse refers to the nerve which is spread like a bundle over the whole leg, to the exclusion of the outer nerve. Rab. Joshua agrees with Rab. Judah that only the right leg is involved. He says that the wrestling match was as when a man grasps another person and his hand touches the hollow of the other's right hip.

Another Rabbi said that the angel appeared to Jacob as a pagan (as a worshipper of stars כַּעֲבוֹר כּוֹכָבִים). The custom is for Jews to keep pagans on their right when walking with them, so Jacob's own right leg was the more easily hurt. Another tradition is the opponent appeared as a wise man. The custom is for Jews to walk on a scholar's left, so Jacob's own right leg was the more easily hurt.

The Rabbis say that the angel came up behind Jacob and dislocated both thighs. They explain בְּהִאָבֵק עִמּוֹ of Gen. 32, 26 as meaning that the two sent up the dust of their feet to the throne of glory, as we see in Nahum 1, 3. In so doing, the Rabbis seem to be stressing the dust and not the grasping actions in the wrestling bout, since they wish both sciatic nerves to be removed.

The nerve is called חֲנֻשָּׁה because it slipped from its place and went up (חֲנֻשָּׁה מִמְקוֹמָהּ וְעָלָה); a similar phrase can be found in Jeremiah 51, 30, "... their strength has slipped away (נִשְׁחָתָה)." Another Rabbi cites Isaia 9, 7, "The Lord sent a word to Jacob and it will fall upon Israel," as referring to the nerve injury to Jacob and the fact that all Israel observes the nerve prohibition.

Another tradition is that in Gen. 43, 16, "... slaughter an animal and prepare it," to prepare means to remove the sciatic nerve, since the law was operative among all the sons of Noah.

Another tradition explains why Jacob was alone; he had gone back to get some small jars. We know that Jacob valued all his hard-earned possessions. The man then wrestled with him all night. This teaches us that an important individual should not go out at night.

91b

Gen. 32, 32 notes specifically that the sun rose on Jacob. A Rabbi asks "Did the sun shine on him

public disinterest in this matter, perhaps brought about by the difficulty in removing the nerve or in deciding where to stop with it as it descends the leg and subdivides.

alone? Did it not shine on all the world?" Rab. Isaac replied that the sun which had set early on his account now rose early on his account. For in Gen. 28, 11, "He came to a place" means that since he had resolved to go back and pray, the earth contracted for him and he came to the place immediately. Then he prayed and the sun set early so that he would rest exactly on the spot (site of the future Temple).

Digression on Jacob's ladder dream. The angel tried to explain why he had to be released to sing praises. His time to sing had been scheduled for that day since the beginning of creation. Digression on the exact duties of praising angels.

92a

Remarks on Hosea 12, 5, "He strove with the angel and prevailed (וַיִּכַּל), he wept and pleaded with him." The subject of וַיִּכַּל may be unclear, but we know from Gen. 32, 29 that Jacob became stronger than the angel. Similarly, we may not know who wept and pleaded in the Hosea verse, but by looking at Gen. 32, 27, we know that the angel wept unto Jacob. Gen. 32, 29 also brings the following comment,

The angel hinted to Jacob that two princes were destined to come from him; the Ruler in exile in Babylon and the Prince in the land of Israel. Thus he hinted to Jacob about the exile.

92b

Dispute over the meaning of the "fat" of a foetus. It means either the fat of the animal or of the sciatic nerve. Dispute over the application of the law to a foetus taken alive from a slaughtered dam. Rab. Judah is always lenient; e.g., he advises one merely to cut the nerve near the hip bone cap, rather than to remove the entire nerve. Continuation of dispute over whether a sciatic nerve imparts a taste.

93b

Return to the matter of there being two nerves in question: the one near the bone and an outer one near the flesh. It is noted that at certain places along the leg the inner nerve is actually nearer the flesh and the outer one nearer the bone. Question arises again about inspecting the work of butchers.

Mishnah 2

Question of whether we may send a whole thigh or just a segment to a Gentile. In general the nerve would be harder to identify in a segment.

94a 94b Questions about buying from and selling to Gentile butchers, in matters relative to the sciatic nerve prohibition.

96a The question of removing all the sciatic nerve or only a symbolic portion of it. Further discussion of Rab. Judah's view towards a symbolic part.

Mishnah 3

Guilt incurred by eating the nerve. Dispute over whether we are speaking of nerve only near the hollow.

96b Further dispute over the quantity to be consumed to incur guilt.

Mishnayoth 4 and 5 combined

Problems arising from the roasting or boiling of sciatic nerves. Disputes on roasting.

97a Conversation turns to forbidden fats and other substances.

97b Problems with salted and marinated thighs. Review of the sixty-to-one rule. Mention made of an older standard which equated forbidden substances to onions or leeks.

99b 100a Further disputes on the taste standard.

Mishna 6

100b Dispute on overlapping prohibitions about sciatic nerves and uncleanness in applying the law to unclean animals. Did the sons of Jacob observe the law? Taste standard and law on fetuses reviewed.

101a More questions on the taste standard and multiple prohibitions.

101b Digression on Sabbaths. The law was given on Sinai because Gen. 32, 33 speaks of the children of Israel. The Jews were not called children of Israel until Sinai; thus the law was given at Sinai but written down in this place to indicate why it was given to them. Rab. Judah objects that they are called the children of Israel in Gen. 46, 5, so the prohibition should date from that point (entry into Egypt).

10C. Other References

In addition to the Hullin section of the Babylonian Talmud, we have several references to this prohibition.

In Antiquities 1, 20, 2, Josephus notes that Jacob refrained from eating thigh nerves in meat in honor of his own injury, and that Jews observe this custom also in honor of Jacob's experience.

In Gen. Rab. 78, 6, it is also mentioned that the nerve is called הנשח (שנשח) because it slipped (שנשח) from its place. The opinion is advanced that the fat of the sciatic nerve is allowed, but that it is avoided out of devotion. Rab. Judah's preference for only the right thigh is mentioned, as well as the alternate possibility that the left thigh could be the prohibited one. Custom favors avoiding both nerves.

In the Jerusalem Talmud, tractate ערלה 3, 1, the topic is grain and vegetable harvests prohibited by Lev. 19, 23 ff. A review of multiple prohibitions leads to a citation of the sciatic nerve prohibition as an example of a partial prohibition (i.e., against eating, but not against other uses of the nerve).¹

In Yalkut, Leviticus 536, mention is made of the non-

¹A similar consideration can be found in Jerus. Talm. פסחים 2, 1, concerning the disposal of left-over portions of leaven.

In Babba Batra 74b, two Rabbis speak of a meal they once had which included a flank of meat. They say that they opened it and cut at it--a possible allusion to the removal of the nerve.

prohibition of the nerve in the thighs of birds.¹ In Cant. Rab. 1, 16 (on Cant. 1, 2), and Pesikta Rab. Kahana 12, 1, we find catalogs of divine commands to the patriarchs, and the sciatic nerve prohibition and Gen. 32, 33 are specifically mentioned. In Yalkut, Leviticus 445, both opinions are given on the matter of sciatic nerves in whole-burnt offerings. A brief restatement can also be found in Yalkut, Leviticus 505, on guilt offerings, which are also whole-burnt.²

The preference of Rab. Judah for the prohibition of the right nerve only was used as a legal analogy in other cases. Thus, in Hullin 134b, the right shoulder should be used in certain sacrifices. In Kiddushin 21b, on piercing the ear of a slave about to be freed, the awl used must be a great awl (borer); Horayoth 12a speaks of the anointed priest, which must mean the high priest. All of these conclusions depend on the use of the definite article, just as Rab. Judah had noticed the definite article on היך in Gen. 32, 33.³

The Mishna and Babylonian Talmud Hullin opinions on

¹In Kerithoth 21a there is question of rules concerning the koy (כוי), which is a cross between a goat and an antelope. Since the thigh is shaped like that of most other animals (i.e., with the bulge), the sciatic nerve prohibition does apply.

²In this passage the preference seems to be for leaving the nerve in place.

³In Peshahim 83b there is a discussion on the destruction of edible remains of Paschal lambs in which many of Rab. Judah's lenient legal opinions on the sciatic nerve question are reviewed, including the specification of the right thigh.

dealing with Gentiles recur in other Talmud tractates. In Sanhedrin 59a Rab. Jose b. Hanina observes that any law given to the sons of Noah and repeated at Sinai is meant for both Jews and Gentiles. If a law was given to the sons of Noah but not repeated at Sinai, it should apply to Israel only. We Israelites have no such case of the latter except for the sciatic nerve law. In Peshahim 22a and in the minor tractate Kallah Rabbati 9, 8,¹ it is mentioned that one may sell thighs containing sciatic nerves to Gentiles.

There are several mentions² of a five-fold prohibition involving the sciatic nerve; obviously the case was an aid to memorizing legal material. A man cooks in milk and eats a thigh containing the sciatic nerve on a festival day. He is guilty of unnecessary work on two counts--lighting the fire and cooking. He is also guilty of cooking meat in milk and of eating the same forbidden combination; and he should be punished for eating the sciatic nerve.³

¹Ch. 9 in Higger; Ch. 10 in Soncino.

²This five-fold case is mentioned in Peshahim 47b, Bezah 12a, and Makkoth 21b.

³Yalkut, Gen. 133 contains a digest of Gen. Rab. 78, 6 and abbreviated summaries of certain Bab. Talm. Hullin passages. These start with the end of 90b, the matter of whether we are speaking only of the right thigh. Almost all of 91a is mentioned; the reference to the angel appearing as a pagan becomes a reference to an angel appearing as a Gentile (כנני). From 91b we have the fact that the angel wished to go to praise God, and a digression on the duties of praising angels. From 92a we have mention of the Ruler in exile in Babylon and the Prince in Israel. Related to Mishnah 2 are

Later Traditions

In Chapter I of this paper, I entered all the Rabbinic materials under sixteen thematic groupings. Here I would like to present five ancient commentaries as an appendix to the ten thematic groupings of this chapter.

My reasons for doing so are simple enough. The passages from Pirke Rab Eliezer and Midrash Abkir evidence a further stage of exaltation of Jacob and should be presented in their entirety. Rashi has several new observations on linguistic and exegetical aspects of the passage, and can also be best appreciated in a full summary. The Zohar has many more citations of the Jabbok material than it had of Mamre, but few of these are properly within the scope of our paper; I thought it best to explain my selection of Zohar citations in a unified analysis of all the Zohar material.

Pirke Rab Eliezer

Ch. 37 of Rab Eliezer's commentary deals with the Jabbok incident. It starts by citing Amos 5, 19, "The day of the Lord shall be as if a man fled from a lion and a bear met him."

The lion is Laban; the bear is Esau, who wished to slay Jacob. Esau had no shame within himself. Jacob prays, citing Gen. 31, 3, about his obedience, and says, ". . . and I fear him (Esau)." Thus we have the popular

comments from 96a and 96b and a review of the question of uses of the sciatic nerve other than nutritional. There is a brief review of the application of the custom to unclean animals (probably from Hullin) and material very similar to 101b on Mishna 6. The author of Yalkut also included the Keritoth 21a question on the sciatic nerve of the koy.

saying that one should not fear a leader or ruler, but rather one in whom there is no fear of heaven.

God sent an angel to save Jacob from Esau. He came as a man and they wrestled all night. In the morning the angel begged to be released, explaining that he had to go to chant praises. Jacob did not want to let him go, so the angel began to sing from on earth. The angels above heard his voice and said, "We hear his voice in honor of the Righteous One." Concerning Him we read in Isaia 24, 16, "From the ends of the earth we hear songs of praise, of glory to the Righteous One."

Jacob demanded and received the angel's blessing. Then Jacob wanted to know the angel's name, which turns out to be Israel (the same as Jacob's new name). Jacob wanted to overpower the angel and to throw him down. So the angel dislocated Jacob's thigh nerve, making it like the fat of something dead (i.e., numb).

The angel reminded Jacob of his promise to tithe, in Gen. 28, 22. So Jacob then tithed 550 animals. The angel said, "Don't you have sons?" So Jacob set aside the first-born sons and counted until the tithe fell on Levi. Michael then brought Levi to heaven and God blessed Levi, and so instituted the priesthood. He also decreed concerning their income.¹

Yalkut Shimoni and Midrash Abkir

The principal comments on our passage can be found in Yalkut, Gen. 131-133. The author incorporates substantially all of Gen. Rab. 76, 9 and 77-78. The only exception is 78, 3, par. 3, involving comments on Isaia 44, 26, and a discussion on whether Jacob or Israel would be the patriarch's more prominent name after Jabbok.

The Yalkut comments on the sciatic nerve law, taken mainly from Bab. Talm. Hullin, have already been mentioned. In addition the Yalkut² adds excerpts from the Pirke Eliezer

¹The chapter then goes on to speak of a violent encounter between Jacob and Esau, based on a severe interpretation of Gen. 33, 4.

²End of 132; start of 133.

passage mentioned above (Ch. 37). The author of Yalkut drops most of Eliezer's comments on the Jabbok story itself, but does mention the matter of tithing the cattle and then Levi. Levi's divine approbation is recounted.¹

The other significant commentary to be found in Yalkut, Gen. 132 is a dialogue between Michael and God; this is identified by Ginzberg as part of a work known as Midrash Abkir.

The "man" who wrestled with Jacob was Michael, who said, "I am one of the chief praising angels; thus you have striven with me, and do you still fear Esau?" One opinion is that Michael was destined to lose his chiefhood only when he yielded it to Jacob.

Jacob asked Michael why he feared the dawn. Meanwhile bands of angels encouraged Michael to ascend for praising, but they also speculated, "... or will Jacob be our leader?" In spite of his pleading, Michael was not released until he imparted a blessing. He said, "Happy are you, born of a woman, who entered the heavenly palace and escaped."²

Another tradition is that while they were wrestling a band of Michael's angels came to assist him, but God held them back, saying, "Michael's strength is failing." Indeed, Michael saw that he could not overcome Jacob, so he touched his thigh nerve. God said to Michael, "You have given my priest a blemish." Michael replied, "Am I not your priest?" God said, "You are my priest in heaven, and Jacob is my priest in the Holy Land."

Michael asked Raphael to heal Jacob, so that men would say, "The sun of the future shines on the just to heal them."³

God asked Michael why he had wrestled with Jacob. Michael said, "I did it for your glory." God said, "Be

¹The author skips the violent encounter between Jacob and Esau, but goes on for a bit about other dealings between the two.

²Tradition presumes that the match took place in heaven.

³Malachi 3, 20 (English 4, 2) is cited here.

with Jacob now and protect him."¹ God said, "You are great, and Jacob will be great . . . you are a fire and Jacob will be a fire (Obad. 1, 18) . . . you are the chief of all the serving angels, and Jacob will be chief of all the faithful." When Michael blessed Jacob, he said, "It is the will of God that your sons be holy, as you are."

Rashi

Rashi's remarks on our passage are worth looking at; perhaps a verse by verse summary would be the best format to use.

V. 23 The text does not mention Dinah. She was hidden in a chest, so that Esau would not see her. Rashi agrees that Dinah might have had a good influence on Esau if he had been allowed to marry her.

V. 24 Jacob himself acted as a ferryman for his family, cattle, and possessions.

V. 25 Jacob was left alone because he had gone back for some small jars. One meaning of the verb וַיִּאָבֵק might be that one gets covered with dirt (dust). Rashi prefers the meaning of a man entangling himself (וַיִּתְקַשֵּׁר), which is an Aramaic word. He cites two examples from the Bab. Talm. of this meaning for the root אָבַק. Another meaning could be grappling (עִנְיָה), as is done in wrestling.

The opponent might have been Esau's guardian angel.

V. 26 The hollow of the thigh is the flesh of the upper thigh, which is shaped like a ladle. וַיִּתְקַשֵּׁר means that the nerve was strongly pushed from its place. Such usage can be found in Jeremiah 6, 8, "My soul is removed from you," and in the Mishnah title לְקַעַקַע בִּיצְחָן which means to root out.

V. 27 The angel had to go at dawn to sing praises. Jacob's demand for a blessing can be taken in the

¹Here are cited Dan. 10, 21, "Michael, your prince, contends by my side," and Dan. 12, 1, "Michael shall arise, the great prince."

sense of "grant me the blessings with which my father blessed me, which Esau now claims."¹

V. 29

The angel, in renaming Jacob, intends that Jacob shall no longer be honored for deceiving and superceding, but for rulership and openness. The angel says that later God would officially change his name at Bethel, and that there the angel would also acknowledge Jacob's right to his father's blessings.

The angel wanted Jacob to wait until Bethel; but Jacob would not wait. So the angel, against his will, granted his rights.

The "men" with whom Jacob strove were Laban and Esau.

V. 30

The angel remarked that he and his companions did not have permanent names, but names which changed according to their assignments.

V. 32

A Midrash tells us that the sun rose on Jacob for his benefit--to heal his limping.² The early sunset at Beersheba is balanced by the early sunrise here. Jacob was limping when the sun rose, not because it rose.

V. 33

The nerve is called הַנֶּרֶב because it moved from its place, in the sense of coming up and out. Similar usages can be found in Jeremiah 51, 30, "Their strength went away," and Gen. 41, 51, "God has made my troubles go away from me."

Maimonides

Maimonides mentions the Jabbok incident only once, in Guide to the Perplexed 2, 42. Angels "appear" in the Old Testament in the sense of prophetic visions or dreams. For example, the man who wrestled with Jacob was a prophetic revelation because it eventually became clear that he was an angel.

¹This is the first instance we have come across of conjecture on the exact nature of the blessing which Jacob sought.

²Malachi 3, 20 (English 4, 2) is cited here.

In his Mishne Torah, Book 5 (קדושה), tractate מאכלות
 חסור Ch. 8, Maimonides reviews the legislation and tradi-
 tions concerning the sciatic nerve. Without presenting his
 opinions in detail, I think it is safe to say that he rather
 closely followed the stricter interpretations favored by the
 Rabbis; he seems to ignore Rab. Judah's lenient tendencies.¹

Zohar

The Zohar brings many new interpretations to the
 Jabbok account.² The few elements in common with prior themes
 include a) that the opponent was Esau's angel;³ b) that the

¹If one were to judge by Maimonides alone, one could
 conclude that, up to his time, the prohibition against eating
 the sciatic nerve had been faithfully followed by devout Jews.

²Most of these interpretations are so involved with
 the movement toward mystical spirituality current in the
 author's time as to be effectively outside the scope of our
 paper. I will just mention them here in a very schematic out-
 line.

- I, 21b Symbolic meanings of "sunlight" and "limping."
- I, 26b. More on "limping" and the left leg.
- I, 35b. Jacob, as the new Adam, opposes Samael.
- I, 144ab. Questions about the corporeal aspects of a
 wrestling angel, the sense in which Jacob en-
 countered God, and the work of good and evil
 spirits.
- I, 146a. Wrestling match with evil spirit on unlucky
 night. Other patriarchs help Jacob.
- I, 169ab. Evil spirits rule the night, especially cer-
 tain unlucky nights.
- I, 171ab. Symbolic meanings of Israel's "night" and
 "day." Jacob represents the Torah. The
 sciatic nerve represents Israel's strength
 and so must be kept whole.
- I, 203a. Allusions to 2 Sam. 23, 4.
- II, 163b. Relationship of Samael to Esau.

³Here identified as Samael, an evil figure.

morning was the time when angels had to sing praises;¹ c) that the dust of the match rose to God's throne (Nahum 1, 3);² d) that Jacob was seeking the right to his father's blessing;³ and e) that Jacob was healed by the sun, since he is well in Gen. 33, 18.⁴

The most striking exegetical item among the new Zohar exegeses is the suggestion that Jacob was left alone at the river because he had deliberately exposed himself to danger.⁵

Conclusions

A comparison of the main interpretations found in the Targums and translations with those found in later Rabbinic materials shows a good deal of continuity.

The entire corpus of writings consistently holds that

¹I, 146a.

²I, 170a.

³This is clear in I, 144b and implied in I, 146a and II, 163b. Rashi also has this interpretation.

⁴I, 203b.

⁵I, 166a. Admittedly, this statement is not elaborated upon in Zohar; Rosenberg's edition reads "... because he brought himself to danger (לפי שהכניס עצמו לסכנה) and he saw that danger with his own eyes." It is possible that the author meant that Jacob should not have gone out at night, as was mentioned in Hullin 91a and Yalkut, Ruth 604. See Yodel Rosenberg, Sefer Zohar Torah (Montreal: Rothchild, 1924).

T. H. Gaster, in Myth, Legend, and Custom in the Old Testament, pp. 206-207, suggests that Jacob actively sought the encounter. I have not found any Rabbinic suggestion dating prior to this Zohar instance which could support Gaster's interpretation.

the opponent of Jacob was an angel.¹ The identification of this angel as Michael, made by Ps.-Jonathan, is one of the two traditional identifications. The other, that he was Esau's guardian angel, cannot be ruled out as a basis for Targum remarks, since Esau's angel was not necessarily an evil force.

Later commentators also took steps to avoid any suggestion in v. 29 that Jacob wrestled with God Himself. As in the Targums, reference was usually made to his having wrestled with an angel. One interesting later device was the Prince in Israel/Ruler in Babylon interpretation.

All the items new with Ps.-Jonathan are later to be found elsewhere--the matter of Levi and of tithing, the early sunrise, and the development of Oral Torah with regard to Gen. 32, 33.

In the Rabbinic traditions about the Mamre account we noticed a good deal of variety in the identification of speakers in the different verses. The Jabbok story, at first sight, does not have such variety in interpretation. However, the Rabbinic tendency for elaboration is evident. The angel was a chief praiser, such as Michael; or he was Esau's guardian, either neutral or partial to Esau's intentions. The angel opponent is variously depicted as a shepherd, robber, pagan, or scholar; he causes fire to erupt from the ground, and Jacob boldly repels his magical maneuvers. Other angels

¹The only mention of the Shekinah being at Jabbok was in Cant. Rab. 3, 6.

are employed, either to serve as a chorus to Michael's doings, or to keep Esau occupied. The nature of Jacob's wound is frequently mentioned, even though a miraculous sun will soon heal his leg. The effect of many of these traditions, it seems to me, is to heighten the sense of awe and mystery surrounding the actual encounter.

We will now evaluate these Jewish materials in light of Patte's hermeneutical norms which were mentioned at the beginning of this dissertation. His first guideline was that a biblical verse can be interpreted by other biblical passages.

The first category of Scriptural citations consists of those which help us to view the story in its context.¹ Different Rabbis reminded us of events in Gen. 28, when Jacob was first blessed by his father, and where there was the early sunset, the dream of the ladder, and his promise to tithe on his return. Gen. 33 also is often recalled, as Esau finally met with Jacob and Jacob utters the fulsome praise of 33, 10. Gen. 35, 10, the second mention of Jacob receiving the new name, is also recalled.

Two other passages can help us understand details of the story. Judges 13, 18 shows us another angel refusing to give his name, in that case to Manoah. Hosea 12, 5, a spe-

¹Even the Mamre story was recalled in one place as an example of angels giving a blessing.

cific reference to the Jabbok story, is used to demonstrate that the angel lost the struggle.¹

Secondly, many citations serve as proof-texts for the Jabbok story. Perhaps the most frequently used are Malachi, 3, 19-20 (Eng. 4, 1-2); Nahum 1, 3; and Obadiah 1, 18. If we reverse our viewpoint on the proof-texts, however, and ask what effect the Jabbok story may have had on their content, then passages such as Deut. 32, 10-12; Isaia 44, 24-28; and the book of Obadiah take on new riches for us.

We have two examples of everything being meaningful in Scripture. The first is the attempt to explain the force of *וַחֲמֵק* in v. 26, by citing other verses in Scripture (five in all). Another fine detail, the definite article on *חֵירָךְ* of v. 33, was used not only for the opinion that only right thighs should be cut, but also as a legal analogy in other Talmudic cases.

We have just a few examples of the telescoping of persons, places, and events in the Rabbinic traditions. Perhaps the most surprising telescoping is the choosing of Levi by God for the priesthood during this same night. I assume that the Ps.-Jonathan and Pirke Rab Eliezer uses of this tradition are

¹Note that Hosea 12, 4b has the same ambiguity with the word *אֱלֹהִים* as does Gen. 32, 29. In v. 5b, "he wept and sought his favor," the Rabbis always assume that the subject is the angel.

not the only cases where the origins of the Levitical priesthood were commented upon.¹

At the end of grouping 7 we find a mention of Moses, who also "strove with God" during his lifetime. Since no other details are given, I suppose one could argue that we do not have a true case of telescoping here; but, since the tradition is that he too in some sense is named "Israel," I think it is an example of the idea that all sacred history is contained in the Scriptures.

Jacob is certainly presented as a moral example. He is self-reliant, solicitous for all his possessions, protective of his children, eager to receive a blessing from the angel, brave, courageous, and physically strong. We even have the concept of merit applied to him, although not on the scale with which it was applied to Abraham. Jacob's merit brings good fortune to his descendants in matters of holiness, business, war, and protection from persecution. God Himself will be "alone" on the Last Day, as Jacob was alone at the river Jabbok.

Patte's second norm was that Scripture is meant to be actualized. He found that such actualizations often dealt with current cultural changes rather than with salient events.

¹Another case of telescoping is the/miraculous early sunset of Gen. 28, 11, which led Jacob to sleep on the site of the future Temple; the only connection with our story is, of course, the early sunrise of Gen. 32, 32.

The bulk of actualizations which the Rabbis made about the Jabbok story concern themselves with cultural changes. Regulations concerning the sciatic nerve are primary among the applications to everyday life. In addition to these extensive regulations we have a few other pieces of practical advice such as to be careful about being outdoors at night, and to be diligent in caring for property.

There are some apparent references to salient events but often these are quite general. For example, mention is made several times of enemies of the Jewish people,¹ but only the Emperor Hadrian and Rome are clearly singled out, and these briefly.² Other specific elements mentioned are the Levitical priesthood and the offices of Prince in Israel and Ruler in Babylon, but no further reflection on them occurs in our references.

Let us recall the hermeneutical modes and rules devised by James Sanders which we examined at the start of our research. We will first look for instances wherein the human faults and weaknesses of the biblical figures are mentioned. We find very little of this "theologizing" hermeneutic in our Jewish sources.

For the Rabbis the primary reason why God sent the

¹Thus the references to hostile nations and wars in groupings 3A, 4, 5 and 9; and the references to God's fulfilling of His many promises about Jerusalem, in grouping 7.

²In groupings 5 and 9 respectively.

angel was clearly to encourage Jacob to stand against Esau;¹ the implication may be that Jacob's fear was so great that, without special encouragement, he might have fled. Rashi mentioned Jacob's past deceptions and his superceding of Esau, but none of our other sources brought these up (at least not within their analyses of the Jabbok story).

The rest of the traditions moralize. They drew lessons, mainly from Jacob's experiences. We are called upon to be like him; we must be courageous, self-reliant, careful of our possessions and our promises.² Like Jacob, we should be eager for divine blessings; we should be holy³ and alone in righteousness.⁴

Granted that the actualizations of this passage by Jewish writers were mainly cultural ones, and that a moralizing hermeneutic prevailed, we may reasonably classify ancient Jewish commentary on the Jabbok story as supportative or constitutive rather than challenging or prophetic, as Sanders uses these terms.

¹Thus Tanhuma B in grouping 4, and the opening section of Midrash Abkir.

²E.g., Jacob promised to tithe upon his safe return to the Holy Land.

³Cf. end of Midrash Abkir.

⁴Cf. grouping 3.

CHAPTER IV
EARLY CHRISTIAN AND ALEXANDRIAN JEWISH USE
OF GENESIS 32, 23-33

Introductory Remarks

We will present Christian comments on the Jabbok passage in the same manner as we did in Ch. II. For the reader who wishes to choose from among them, I would recommend Justin Martyr, Philo, Origen, Procopius, and Chrysostom in the East, and Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, and Gregory the Great in the West--with Philo, Chrysostom, and Augustine being the most important three of all.

We should recall at this point that some of the Christian understanding that Jesus was at the Jabbok may have originated in Jewish Christian readings of Christ into Old Testament events involving Michael. Daniélou has also postulated another Jewish Christian concept, namely that there was a leading angel whose name was Israel.¹ This angel, who gave his own name to Jacob, was seen by Jewish Christians as a symbol for Christ. In his reconstruction of this concept, Daniélou worked primarily with references in Philo, Origen,

¹The Theology of Jewish Christianity, pp. 132-134.

and Justin. In this chapter we will touch on Justin's statement on the matter.

A. Early Greek and Latin Apologists

1. Justin Martyr

In Trypho 58, 10, Justin cites the Jabbok incident as one wherein the Christ, in human form, wrestled with Jacob.¹ Justin comments² elsewhere that Jesus changed Peter's name and also the names of the sons of Zebedee; these actions on the part of Jesus should be a clue to us that the same person had also changed Jacob's name to Israel.³

In Trypho 125, 3 Justin explains that in Hebrew the name Israel means "a man conquering power" (ἰσραήλ = one con-

¹The context places more emphasis on the Mamre account and the burning bush of Exodus 3; the need for a "second God" is postulated in all these cases because God the Father cannot be confined within limits of time and space.

Justin's use of the term "second God" for Christ may be an unfamiliar one to our ears. Eusebius of Caesarea (Church History 1, 2) variously refers to Jesus as the second cause of the universe, the divine Word who holds the second place to the Father, and the second Lord after the Father. Later Arian controversies will force the abandonment of such terms.

B. Kominiak, on p. 74 of his unpublished dissertation, points out that Justin considered the wrestler at Jabbok as a real divine person distinct from God the Father, rather than as an angel who represented the Father.

²Trypho 106. Here the themes of Psalm 22 are related to Jesus. V. 24 (English v. 23) mentions Jacob and Israel.

³In Trypho 126, 3 Justin again cites Jacob's words of vv. 31 and 32, about seeing God face to face and calling the place Εὐδοκία, in order to show that Jacob's adversary was truly divine.

quers, and $\text{הָא} = \text{power}$).¹ The mysterious event of Jacob wrestling with his opponent is a sign of the Incarnate Christ's future battle with the devil in the desert. There too the evil power would be defeated and disgraced. Another sign² which was given at Jabbok was when the opponent numbed Jacob's thigh. In this case Jacob's numbness signifies the numbness of pain and suffering which Jesus would have at His crucifixion.

Another relationship between Jesus and the Jewish people lies in the name Israel. Israel was really an old name for Jesus; when He gave this name to Jacob, He was signifying that Jacob and his descendants are called to be a part of the true Israel--the followers of Jesus.³

Justin is aware of the literal Hebrew meaning of the name Israel, as well as of a tradition about Israel being another name for Jesus. His attempts to find types at Jabbok for Jesus' changing the names of some of His followers and for Jesus' temptation in the desert will not be followed by other Christians.

¹Presumably Justin is referring to the verb שָׁרָה and to the noun לָא .

²Trypho 125, 5.

³So Trypho 125, 5. The name Israel for Jesus is mentioned in Trypho 75, 2. One of the bases for saying that it is an old name for Jesus is the LXX reading of Isaia 42, 1, taken together with the whole of Isaia 42, 1-4; this can be found in Trypho 123, 1.

2. Irenaeus

In The Apostolic Preaching 5, 1¹ Irenaeus implies that Jesus is the subject of all Old Testament theophanies; thus He would have been the wrestler and the one who gave Jacob his new name.

3. Ascension of Isaia

In Ch. 7, 3-5, of this early anonymous work,² Isaia is being escorted by an angel; Isaia asks the angel what his name is, but the angel refuses to tell him. It is possible that the author had cases like Gen. 32, 30 and Judges 13, 18 in mind.

4. Tertullian

Tertullian mentions the wrestling match once³ as a

¹The text is in Armenian. I am relying on Froidevaux's French translation (S.C., vol. 62).

²The principal text is Ethiopic; I used pp. 652-653 of Vol. 2 of New Testament Apochrypha by E. Hennecke, Westminster, 1965. Wilhelm Schneemelcher edited the original German work, and R. Wilson edited this English translation. The Ascension of Isaia was translated by H. Duensing, who includes a technical introduction on pp. 642-644. E. Tisserant edited Latin manuscripts of parts of this work in his Ascension d'Isaie, Paris, 1909; pp. 144-145 contain our passage.

³De Carne Christi 3, 6 (C.C., vol. 2, p. 877). As before, we will use the Bueron Abbey edition of the Vetus Latina. The Vetus is a rather literal Latin translation from the LXX. Thus in v. 24 transi(i)t, like διέβη, is not causative; in v. 25 luctatus est renders ἐπάλαυνεν; and, in v. 26, obstipuit is also not too close to σπνι. In v. 29 the Vetus divides the phrase exactly as the LXX, "for you have prevailed with God, and you are strong with men," and many manuscripts add a future sense to the second part, as was the case with LXX manuscripts. In v. 31 פני דאי is translated as faciem Dei or visio Dei or the like. In v. 33 the Vetus also seems to ignore הושיע and to use verbal phrases instead.

case wherein an angel took on human flesh and form. If angels can be sent on missions like this, how much more could God have taken on true humanity in Jesus.

On other occasions Tertullian advocates that the opponent was Jesus.¹ In Adv. Marc. 4, 39, 7² Tertullian explains that the name Israel means "one who prevails with God." This could certainly have been based on the Jabbok story.

Tertullian's use of the fact of the temporary enfleshment of an angel as an argument for Christ's incarnation is a theological interpretation more than an attempt at exegesis. Nevertheless it is an attempt to take the story literally, as is his understanding that the name Israel in Hebrew means one who prevails with God.

5. Hippolytus of Rome³

Hippolytus tells us that some people think that the name Israel means "a man who sees God," while others think it means "a man who will see God."⁴ This is the first instance of a Christian derivation of the name Israel based on the supposed Hebrew אֱלֹהִים יִשְׂרָאֵל. Presumably Hippolytus knew this from

¹Thus in Adv. Praxean 14, 5 and 8 (C.C. 2, pp. 1177-1178) mention is made of Gen. 32, 31 as part of a proof to show that Christ appeared to men before His Incarnation.

²C.C. 1, p. 652.

³See Quasten II, 163-207, for a biography and digest of Hippolytus' works.

⁴Pentateuch Fragment 16, on Gen. 49, 7 (G.C.S. 2, p. 58; Hans Achelis, ed.).

Alexandrian circles, since the idea can easily be traced to Philo. This derivation will dominate in both Eastern and Western hermeneutics.

6. Novatian

In De Trin. 19, 6-14¹ Novatian comments on the Jabbok story. I will briefly outline this commentary here, putting paragraph numbers on the left.

- 6 Sometimes in Scripture Jesus is depicted as God and an angel, sometimes as God and a man. In the latter case the Scriptures speak of what Christ would be; they portray in an image what Christ would become in truth.
- 8 The struggle between the man and Jacob at the Jabbok makes no sense unless it prefigures that future contention between Christ and the sons of Jacob, which is said to reach its fulness in the Gospels.²
- 9 The sons of Jacob strove against Jesus and prevailed, but they became lame and uncertain of their own faith and salvation. They still need His blessing.
- 10 The wrestler gave Jacob the name Israel, which means "a man who sees God." Jacob's opponent was not only a man but also God.
- 11 Jacob definitely knew that his opponent was divine since he was told "you have prevailed with God."
- 12 Jacob realized the importance of this event (vim sacramenti), and so he called the place "Vision of God."
- 13 Jacob held onto the man as if he (Jacob) were the victor, but he asked for a blessing as a lesser.
- 14 God and man wrestled with Jacob; in Christ, God and man, this symbol is fulfilled.

¹C.C. 4, pp. 48-50.

²De Trin. 9, 4 also says that the book of Genesis makes Christ known when it speaks of a man wrestling with Jacob (C.C. 4, p. 25).

Novatian takes the wrestling as a type of the future struggle between Jesus and the Jews. This unfortunate "sermon illustration" typology, as well as the one about the spiritual lameness of Jews, will often be echoed in our sources.

B. Alexandrian Hermeneutics

1. Philo

Philo frequently allegorized various elements of the Jabbok account, although he does not have one major commentary on the entire passage as such. Using the Loeb texts, we will collect Philo's remarks under six categories which follow the general sequence of the story.

a) Wrestling in the soul

In De Mut. Nom. 12, 81-82 Philo reflects on Jacob, the tripper and supplanter. A supplanter is one who must disrupt the foundations of passion; he must wrestle and fight hard, and know well the exercises of the soul. In De Sobr. 13, 65 we read that Jacob represents the virtues of self-discipline since he was an athlete, exercised in a contest with the passions. In Leg. All. 3, 58, 190 we see that pleasure lies in wait to overpower the good mind, but pleasure shall be overthrown by "Jacob." He is an expert in wrestling, the kind of wrestling in which the soul wrestles with the ways which oppose her, fighting passions and evils.¹

¹A somewhat similar development can be found in De Sac. Abel 4, 17.

In De Mut. Nom. 12, 83-86 Philo notes that Abram is

b) The Nature of Jacob's opponent

Philo consistently regards the opponent as a good angel.¹ In De Mut. Nom. 12, 87 we note that Jacob was renamed by an angel attendant on God, a word, and not by God Himself. In De Somn. 21, 129 Philo identifies the opponent as a divine word.² This angel first regards Jacob as a pupil,³ and then at Jabbok as an athletic trainee with himself as a coach. In De Mut. Nom. 2, 14 the wrestler is called the "unseen" opponent; this could either refer to the darkness of the night bout or perhaps to the angelic nature of the wrestler.

c) Jacob is graced

The principal effect of Jacob's encounter with this messenger from God was to make him spiritually more perfect. In De Ebr. 20, 82-83 Jacob is a symbol of good Jewish people.⁴ Consider Jacob at the river as he is raised to seeing God from

always called Abraham after his name change, but Israel is often referred to by his former name of Jacob. This is because Abraham's virtue came about by teaching by God, while Jacob's virtue came from self-discipline and so is subject to human weakness at times.

¹In Ps. Philo Biblical Antiquities 18, 6 the angel is described as "the one who takes charge of the praises" (qui stabat super ymnos). Cf. John Bowker, The Targums and Rabbinic Literature (Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 312.

²Context indicates that this "divine word" is an angel and not God.

³When Jacob had the ladder dream.

⁴Good Jewish people have education for a "mother," which leads to good customs; they have right reason for a "father," which leads to good laws.

a state of only hearing of God; he is brought to deeds from mere words, and to perfection from progress. It was God who helped him to understand all this. Thus Jacob's name is a sign of learning and progress, while Israel signifies perfection. The vision of God reminds us of the meaning of the name Israel. In a sense Israel (seeing God) is strong in God and Jacob (seeker of virtue) is strong among men.¹

d) Meaning of Jacob's injury

Philo assigned spiritual values to Jacob's injury. Thus in De Mut. Nom. 35, 187 he discusses the limitations of human virtue. Virtue sometimes seems to suffer some "numbness" or to be a bit "lame," as when Jacob limped. In De Praem. 7, 44 Philo speaks about how truly blessed are those who receive a vision of God, tempered to human limitations. Such was Israel, called a seer of God, who saw that God exists. He also received "numbing" as a prize, a numbing of false pretense and arrogance.²

e) Meaning of the sunlight

In De Somn. 14, 79 Philo discusses figurative meanings for the word sun. One meaning is sense perception, since the sun shows all perceivable things to the understanding. For

¹A similar analysis, of Jacob as a seeker and Israel as one who has become worthy of "seeing" God, can be found in De Migr. Abr. 36, 200-201; the term "principle of seventy" is explained in par. 199.

²In De Somn. 21, 130-132 "numbness" signifies Jacob's humility in the presence of the angel opponent.

example, when Israel left Penueel the fact that the sun was shining on him means that Jacob reverted to a life of mere sense perception.

f) Other aspects of Jacob

In De Mut. Nom. 5, 39 Philo praises those who are devout toward God and, at the same time, are attentive to human matters.¹ Jacob was such a person, strong with God and with men.²

In De Sac. Abel 36, 120 Jacob is taken as a symbol of spiritual work and progress, which derive from a natural goodness.³ Israel stands for the virtue of contemplating God.

These summaries show how completely wide of the literal was Philo's treatment of the Jabbok story. He used it only as a basis for spiritual allegories and did not relate it to its Genesis contexts at all.

2. Clement

In Pedagogus 1, 7, 57⁴ Clement says that it was Jesus who wrestled with Jacob; it was Jesus who led and guided and wrestled and anointed the athlete Jacob against evil. Jesus

¹In par. 44 "human matters" are further specified as life and the sense world.

²Par. 44.

³The mention of natural goodness as a meaning for Jacob is somewhat different from Philo's normal interpretation, which tends to stress Jacob's self-discipline.

⁴G.C.S. 12, pp. 123-124.

was at the same time the trainer of Jacob and the teacher of all men, in that He would not reveal His name to Jacob (because He had not yet been born of the flesh). Jacob said that he had seen God face to face; the face of God is the Word (Jesus). Jacob was renamed Israel, which means that he had seen God the Lord.¹

In the Stromata we have several explanations of the names Jacob and Israel. We are told that Jacob means athlete, because Jacob exercised with many truths.² Israel means "he who sees God."³ The true gnostic, who has done much contemplation of spiritual things, becomes a true Israelite, a true seer.⁴

3. Origen

The few citations which we have from Origen are almost all in Latin translations by Rufinus. I will indicate those which are in Greek.

¹In Ps. Clement Homilies 18, 13 (G.C.S. 42, p. 247) there is a brief assertion that it was truly Jesus with whom Jacob wrestled.

²Stromata 1, 5, 31 (G.C.S. 52, p. 20).

³1, 5, 31 and 2, 5, 20 (G.C.S. 52, pp. 20 and 123).

⁴Stromata 4, 26, 169 (G.C.S. 52, p. 323).

In some Ps. Clementine writings the wrestler is depicted as an angel, and not as Jesus. Thus in Homilies 20, 7 (G.C.S. 42, 272) we read that on this occasion God gave an angel a human body for his task; after wrestling, the angel was allowed to return to his proper state (that of fire). The fiery angel lamed Jacob by causing a minor burn on his leg, but he did not burn him severely. In Homilies 16, 14 (G.C.S. 42, p. 224) we learn that sometimes Scripture calls an angel by the term God, as in the Jabbok account.

Origen sometimes held for Christ having been at Jabbok. Thus in Homily 1 on Matthew, 6¹ we learn that Jesus wrestled with Jacob per angelum, and that He allowed Jacob to win so that He might bless Jacob's purity of heart and that He might rename him Israel. In his commentary on Romans Origen says² that Israel was given that name when he saw God, and the new true Israelites (Christians) will be those who have "seen" Christ.³

Another explanation is had in De Princip. 3, 2, 5⁴ where the topic is the waging of spiritual battles. The theme is that man by himself needs divine aid to overcome the power of evil. In the Jabbok story there were two angels: one who wrestled with Jacob, and one who wrestled against him. The good angel (the one who wrestled with him) also gave him the name Israel; the good angel helped to keep the fight going. The Scriptures also say that Jacob was strong with God. This means that Jacob finished the fight and so was led to God.⁵

¹G.C.S. 41, p. 245.

²Bk. 7, sect. 14 (P.G. 14, col. 1141).

³The same explanation that Israel means "a man who sees God," can be found in John bk 2, ch. 31 (25) (G.C.S. 10, p. 88).

⁴G.C.S. 22, p. 254.

⁵This idea of a good angel and a bad angel both being involved at Jabbok appears again in Homily 1 on Exodus, 5 (G.C.S. 29, p. 152).

In two locations Origen mentions an Apochrypha of Joseph, in which Jacob's angelic opponent is identified as

Origen noted the names given to the patriarch. In Homily 11, Exodus, 5¹ Jacob is described as an athlete in spiritual matters, whose name means wrestler and supplanter. In Homily 15 on Genesis, 3² Origen remarks that both names, Israel and Jacob, continue to be used after Jabbok. The sense of Origen's analysis of the two names seems to be that the name Israel is somehow superior. For example, Jacob asks the wrestler his name (an unwise move) while the sons of Israel refrain from eating the thigh nerve (a devout practice).

Most of Origen's allegorical remarks are spiritual in intent. Presumably he came to the idea that there were two angels present because he needed one to symbolize Jesus and one to symbolize evil.

C. Later Eastern Writers

Let us briefly consider here five Eastern writers later than Origen. These Fathers generally concentrate on Christ's presence at Jabbok, and on anti-Jewish lesser typologies and allegories. Procopius' intention to preserve many traditions makes his Jabbok commentary somewhat confusing.

1. Eusebius of Caesarea, in his Church History, 1, 2,

Uriel, who sought to take Jacob's place on earth. So John Bk. 2, ch. 31 (25) (G.C.S. 10, pp. 88-89) and Philocalia 23, 19 (J. Robinson, The Philocalia of Origen /Cambridge University Press, 18937, p. 208). Both these citations are in Greek.

¹G.C.S. 29, p. 257.

²G.C.S. 29, p. 131.

7-9¹ holds that Christ was appointed as teacher of knowledge about the Father to all men; therefore He is the subject of all Scriptural theophanies. He appeared to Jacob at the Jabok in the form of a man. Christ, and not an angel, was the wrestler.²

2. Didymus the Blind,³ in commenting on Zechariah 2, 2 (English 1, 19)⁴ notes that the name Israel means "he who mentally sees God."

3. Cyril of Alexandria identifies the wrestler as Jesus. In Expositio Symboli Nicaeni 1, 16⁵ the wrestler is "the word of God made man, in the form of the Father, according to a spiritual image and according to all which is unchangeably His." In De Incarnatione 31⁶ Jesus is described as the figure of the essence of the Father.

In the former citation Jacob's lameness also symbolized later Jewish lameness of unbelief in Jesus; in the latter

¹G.C.S. 9.1, pp. 14-16.

²In 1, 4, 8 (p. 40) a remark is made about Jesus speaking with Israel in the past; Jacob/Israel is clearly meant rather than the people as a whole. Christ is also the opponent in Demonstratio Evangelicae 5, 11 (G.C.S. 6, pp. 233-235).

³Cf. Quasten III, 85-100. Quasten points out that Didymus (d. 398) was the last important teacher in the catechetical school at Alexandria.

⁴Book 1, 88 (S.C. 83, p. 238).

⁵Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum 1.5, E. Schwartz, Berlin, 1924, p. 348.

⁶Op. cit., p. 208.

the struggle symbolized the Jewish struggle against Jesus.

4. John Maxentius, a Scythian monk of the sixth century, wrote in Contr. Nest. 2, 15 that Jacob wrestled with a man in a vision; this man was Jesus.¹

5. Procopius of Gaza has several insights on the Jabbok story in his Commentarii in Genesin 32.² We will summarize them here, by Migne columns.

455 The Jabbok is a river in Arabia, now called the Iambyces. The word Jabbok means "contest." Who was the man-God who fought with Jacob? It was Christ, the word of God. See that Jesus does not struggle with those who do not cross the river; they are precursors of those Jews who have refused the grace of Baptism.³ They stay in the shadows of night and ignorance, etc. These unbelieving Jews are infirm and crippled. Jacob's lameness at Jabbok signified this because his thigh stands for his seed. Some of the Jews "recover" from their lameness through charity and faith in Christ.

457 Jacob grasps in order to seek salvation; his name is changed to Israel, which means "a mind which perceives God."⁴

God does not reveal His name to Jacob since no creature can comprehend its creator. Any name could only tell of some aspect of God; for this reason Jacob called the place figuram Dei.

Jacob then wrestled with a demon in the form of Esau. A helping angel stood by Jacob during the fight, whom no devil could overwhelm. In order to remind Jacob that he was the more powerful angel, the helping

¹Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum 4.2, Berlin, 1914, p. 36.

²P.G. 87A, cols. 455-460. For the final verse we have Greek fragments; for all the verses we have a Latin translation.

³Allegories about sacraments are rather rare in the exegeses of our two passages.

⁴Later he uses the phrase "one who contemplates God."

angel touched his thigh and made him limp.

The phrase "he saw that he could not overwhelm him," of v. 26, is ambiguous. If the subject were Christ, how could He not overwhelm Jacob? If the subject were Jacob, then the object could be Christ.

459

Procopius advances the suggestion that the subject was the demon. In any case, the helping angel also wrestled with Jacob in order to make him a stronger negotiator with Esau.

The Jews do not abstain from the thigh nerve because it was numbed, but because God as a man wrestled with Jacob and touched his nerve. So in our own day it is easier to believe in the Incarnate Christ because of such lesser signs.¹

Besides his reconstruction of the wrestling, Procopius does bring in some positive explanations concerning the wounding of Jacob's thigh. The wound was a reminder (perhaps not appreciated) for Jacob as to who was sent from heaven. The Jewish custom of abstaining from this nerve in animals is an attempt to honor God's presence at Jabbok. As with Origen, Procopius' involved explanation of the wrestling is not at all in accord with the plain meaning of the text.

D. Antiochean Hermeneutics

1. John Chrysostom

Chrysostom's few literal comments on the Jabbok story are to be found in Homily 58 in Genesim 2-3.²

¹The Greek is ἀληθείας ὑστερον ἔχων, "lesser foot-steps of truth." The Latin translation speaks of certissima veritatis . . . vestigia, which is not very close to the Greek.

²P.G. 53, cols. 509-511.

509 The wrestling match shows God's φιλανθρωπία;¹ He, in the guise of a man, wrestled with the just one (Jacob) to teach Jacob that nothing terrible was going to happen to him.

God touched and dislocated Jacob's thigh in order to drive out cowardice from him, and to encourage him to meet with his brother Esau.

God asked to be released in order to show Jacob his own strength.

God asked Jacob his name to show His own condescension, and to teach Jacob who the wrestler really was. He gave Jacob the new name Israel, which means "one who sees God."²

Jacob asks his opponent's name but he is not told it. God's refusal was as if He had said, "Remain within your own limitations."

Jacob's remark about having seen God face to face is another indication of his new found confidence.

¹Note the use of the same word for divine love for men as was used to explain the human motive for hospitality by Philo, Chrysostom, and others in Chapter I.

²There is a series of homilies on Matthew, now assumed to be by an anonymous author dating from the middle of the sixth century, which were formerly attributed to Chrysostom. In *Homily 15* (P.G. 56, col. 717) the author comments on the "face" spoken of in Matt. 6, 16. It refers to one's "spiritual" face--one's conscience or heart. This is what Jacob was talking about at Jabbok when he said that he had seen God face to face. He could not have seen God's face, since He appeared in human form; this bodily form was a veil and not the essence of God. Rather, Jacob saw God mentally. So he was renamed Israel, which means "a mind which sees God." In turn, God looked at Jacob's conscience at Jabbok.

510 The sun rising on Jacob reminds Chrysostom of the sun which had shone on Abraham at Mamre; general remarks follow on how greatly God shines His blessings down on all of us.¹

Chrysostom is concerned with the context of the Jabbok story. He sees the wrestling as intended to help Jacob deal with Esau. As simple as this interpretation may seem to us, many of his predecessors preferred allegorical devices instead. Theodoret is close to Chrysostom on this passage. Neither man spends time discussing the mode of theophany or doctrinal points which could be made by using verses in this passage.

2. Theodoret

In Quaest. in Gen. 36, 92² it is asked why the angel had wrestled with Jacob. It was to inspire courage in Jacob; it was as if the angel had said, "If you can beat me, can you still fear a man like Esau?" For further encouragement the angel again indicated the reason for Jacob's victory when he gave him his new name, saying "You have struggled with God, and with men you will be strong."

¹510-511. Jewish avoidance of the thigh nerve in meats prompts some criticism by Chrysostom as to their lack of appreciation of the deeper meanings which lie behind such customs.

²P.G. 80, cols. 200-201.

E. Western Writers through Augustine1. Commentarius in Symbolum Nicaenum

The author notes¹ that the Father does not reveal His true name (and hence His true self) to men. Jacob sought His name at Jabbok and was simply told that "it is wonderful."²

2. Hilary of Poitiers

Hilary asserts that Jesus wrestled with Jacob at the river.³ He notes the incongruity of Jacob's prevailing and yet seeking a blessing.

Your mind and body are at cross purposes; your mind is elsewhere as you are acting.

Jacob seeks a blessing because he believes that the opponent is truly God,

You do not see with physical eyes that which your sight of faith perceives.

The wrestler is subject to Jacob, looking to the mystery of His human suffering in the future.⁴ Jacob's faith is not undermined by the appearance nor by the weakness of the wrestler.

¹This is an anonymous work from northern Italy, c. 350. I am using the edition of C. H. Turner, Ecclesiae Occidentalis Monumenta Juris Antiquissima 1.2, Oxford, 1913, Ch. 8, p. 339.

²This phrase is a frequent Vetus variant, borrowed from Judges 13, 18.

³De Trin. 5, 19 (P.L. 10, cols. 141-142).

⁴In De Trin. 4, 31 (P.L. 10, col. 119) it is Christ who appeared as a man to Jacob, wrestled with him, and lost.

3. Phoebadius

Phoebadius¹ points out that appearances of Christ to Old Testament figures such as Abraham or Jacob at the Jabbok do not imply that at that time He was corporeal, visible, or mortal. Rather, these appearances occur in image, mystery, dream, or vision.

4. Gregory of Illiberia

Gregory says that Christ appeared at the Jabbok as a man so that He might present an image of the future struggle which would take place with Israel when He would come according to the flesh. Jacob believed his opponent to be Lord; and so he accepted the new name Israel, which means "a man who sees God."²

5. Ambrose

Ambrose treats of the Jabbok story in his De Jacob 2, 30-31.³ We will summarize that analysis here, adding in remarks from his other writings.

30 Jacob, who had a heart free of agitation and full of peaceful feelings, cast away all his belongings and then wrestled with God. This shows us that whoever keeps aloof from material things becomes more spiritually perfect. "Wrestling

¹Phoebadius was an early bishop of Agen, France, in the latter half of the fourth century. The material cited here is from Liber Contra Arianos 17 (P.L. 20, cols. 25-26).

²De Fide 80-81 (C.C. 69, p. 242).

³C.S.E.L. 32.2, pp. 49-50.

with God" means to take up the struggle for virtue.¹

Jacob's faith and devotion were very strong. Christ touched his thigh in order to signify that He would be born of Jacob's line and would be coequal with God. Jacob's numbness foretells the cross of Jesus--His own body would suffer numbness and unconsciousness.²

The sun rose on Jacob to signify that the cross would beam upon (inluxit) the sons of Jacob; also the Sun of Justice rises over whoever perceives God.³

31 Jacob limped, and the children of Israel do not eat thigh nerves. This refusal to eat symbolizes a refusal to believe in Jesus. Another interpretation of Jacob's limping is that his two legs represent Jews and Christians; the one leg (Jews) will have a numbness concerning the grace of faith.

Most of Ambrose's remarks are spiritual allegories or

¹In Liber de Institutione Virginis 16, 101 (P.L. 16, col. 344) the context is that virgins should wear the "garment of virtue"; Jacob was wearing this garment when he saw a man at the Jabbok and requested a blessing from him as if from the Lord God.

²In his comments on Psalm 43 (sect. 17, C.S.E.L. 64, p. 275) Ambrose notes that Jacob's numbness is a sign that his descendants would have Jesus wounded in His passion. The Jews would not eat of the thigh nerve because they continue not to understand the mystery of Christ. They cheat only themselves in this.

³In sect. 6 of this same commentary on Psalm 43 (pp. 263-264) the sun which rose immediately upon Jacob was the Sun of Justice, Christ born of a virgin. Jacob saw in specie and believed; his descendants saw Christ in truth and did not believe. Their days are few; we are shone upon. The day falls them; it comes upon us.

lesser anti-Jewish observations of the sort we have seen before. His remarks that the touching of Jacob's thigh indicated Christ's equality with the Father is also simply an allegorical remark, even if doctrinal in nature.

6. Hegesippus

This is a late fourth century Christian free rendition of Josephus' The Jewish War which mentions that Jacob wrestled with and prevailed over the Lord, who is thought by men to be unconquerable.¹

7. Jerome

Jerome's Vulgate translation of the Jabbok account differs in some respects from the Vetus, LXX, and MT texts.²

¹Hegesippus 5, 16, 1 (C.S.E.L. 66, p. 325).

²Jerome's v. 24 is somewhat abbreviated and simplified; v. 25 adds an ecce but has a simple mane. In v. 26 the statim could be interpreting the initial בּתחבוק; Jerome's use here of emarcuit seems to be closer to the LXX than to the MT. In vv. 25 and 27 MT has שָׁחַר; the Vulgate, like the LXX, uses a different word in v. 27. In v. 29 Jerome has the opponent explain the name Israel as meaning that "if you have been strong against God, how much the more shall you prevail against men?" In vv. 31 and 32 Jerome uses Phanuel and does not translate. In v. 32 the statim might reflect the כּ in כּאשר. V. 33 seems to be closer to the LXX than to the MT. The Roman Catholic Douay version faithfully retained all these nuances of Jerome's.

In Hebr. Quaest. in Genesim (C.C. 72, pp. 40-41) Jerome discusses the meaning of the word Israel. He prefers a meaning such as princeps cum Deo or princeps Dei (based on פָּרַד), and he criticizes Josephus, LXX, Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion for their renditions. He then explains his translation of v. 29 by the following hypothetical words of the opponent,

"As indeed I am a ruler (princeps) so also you, who have been able to wrestle with me, shall be called a ruler. If you have been able to fight with me, who

In his commentary on Hosea¹ Jerome speaks of Jacob's endurance against God, in wrestling with the angel (God's representative) all night long. Because he was so combative he received the new name Israel, which means directus Dei.²

In Contra Pelag. 3, 8³ we read that Jacob wrestled

am God or an angel (since many people understand this in different ways), how much the more shall you be able to fight with men--that is, with Esau, whom you need not dread."

Another possible derivation of the word Israel could be directus Dei, based on the verb יָשַׁר. In any case the frequently used איש ראיה אל etymology is not valid, and Jacob's opponent did not use it in v. 29.

Jerome also defends his use of Phanuhel as a place name (i.e., his not translating the word), since it is found elsewhere in the O.T.

In this passage Jerome's abilities as a Latin stylist are fairly evident. We have eleven uses of the conjunction waw in the MT which are retained by the Vetus. These are וַיַּעֲבֹד and וַיִּקְחֶם of v. 24; וַיֵּרָא and וַיִּנָּס of v. 26; both uses of וַיֵּאמֶר in v. 27; the second וַיֵּאמֶר in v. 29; both uses of וַיֵּאמֶר in v. 30; and וַיִּקְרָא in v. 31. The LXX retains a וַיֵּאמֶר in eight of these cases, dropping the conjunction in its translation of the וַיֵּרָא from v. 26 and of וַיֵּאמֶר in its second occurrences in vv. 27 and 28. Jerome, on the other hand, uses other methods of expression in all eleven cases.

When comparing the Vulgate with the Vetus, we are struck by the repetitions in the Vetus. The Vetus, for example, has the chain of suas, et . . . suas, et . . . suos in v. 23; Jerome uses the possessive adjective just once. The Vetus has the chain dixit, dic, and dixit in v. 30; Jerome uses dic, but avoids both uses of dixit. The Latin of the Vulgate translation is thus more polished than that of the Vetus.

¹Book 3, 2/6 (C.C. 76, pp. 132-134).

²This is another instance of the use of the verb יָשַׁר, which Jerome transliterates as isar (p. 133). In the same place, Jerome interprets Hosea 12, 5b, "he wept and sought his favor," to mean that Jacob did the weeping and beseeching.

³P.L. 23, col. 604.

with an angel in human form, who renamed him rectissimus Dei.¹
The Lord also encouraged Jacob to meet with his brother Esau.

In his commentary on Ephesians 6, 12² Jerome discusses the role of evil powers in the spiritual life. They are very real, and they can often tempt us mightily to sin,

Such a wrestling match we think Jacob had (not against flesh and blood) when he remained alone and a man wrestled with him. The man helped him and gave him strength against a third party who struggles in great sweat.

The third party was a devil, a very real devil who struggled all night long.³

Jerome discusses Scriptural meanings of motions of the sun in his commentary on Ecclesiastes 1, 5.⁴ Sometimes the sun represents Jesus, the Sun of Justice; this sun "went down" when Jacob left the Holy Land,⁵ and it "rose" upon Jacob when he returned.

¹Presumably based on יִשְׂרָאֵל. In Liber Interp. Hebr. Nom. I sect., (C.C. 72, pp. 67-68) we have entries for Jacob (sup-plantor) and Jabbok (battleground or contest), but no entry for Israel.

²Commentary on Epistle to Ephesians, 2, 6 (P.L. 26, col. 579).

³Something of the same idea can be found in Jerome's comments on Psalm 11, 2 (C.C. 78, p. 358). This text is entitled Tractatus de Psalmo X, and is part of a second series of fourteen Psalm commentaries edited by G. Morin. Here a devil admits to having wounded Jacob's thigh hollow.

⁴C.C. 72, p. 254.

⁵It is certainly possible that Jerome is in some sense adapting Rabbinic traditions about the early sunset in Gen. 28, 11.

In his commentary on Isaia 6, 1-10¹ Jerome remarks that men can "see" God, or wrestle with Him as Jacob did, only with the eyes of the mind, and that only when God wills it. No one can perceive (cernere) God with his physical eyes and still live.

Jerome focuses frequently on literal aspects of the Jabbok story. His interpretations of the name Israel, his interest in the match as related to Esau, and his disinclination to specify the exact nature of the wrestler testify to this. On the other hand, Jerome also comes up against the need to have a third party present when he allegorizes the story as a spiritual struggle. His allegory about the sun representing Jesus has little merit.

8. Augustine

Augustine has some new allegories in his treatment of the Jabbok story. The best example is found in Sermon 5, 6-8.²

6 Jacob, signifying the Christian people, wrestled with the Lord; this opponent was actually an angel representing God.³ Jacob grasped for the kingdom of heaven; we should grasp for Christ by trying to love our enemies. Jacob asked for a blessing which resulted in the changing of his name. He was also lamed; thus he was one man, partly lamed and partly blessed.

¹C.C. 73, In Esaiam 3, 6, 1, p. 85.

²C.C. 41, pp. 57-59.

³Angelus gestans personam Dei. Later the phrase angelus in persona Domini is used.

- 7 The opponent's request to be released, in v. 27, is puzzling. The mystery is the same as when the risen Christ said to Mary Magdalene, "Do not touch me, for I have not yet gone to the Father." Mary Magdalene represents the Church and Christ's prohibition means that we should not concentrate on His boidly person but rather that we should realize that He is equal to the Father. So Jacob attempted to hold on tightly to his opponent; the request for release means that Christ was saying, "Do not consider me to be only a man."
- The morning is the light of truth and wisdom by which we can learn of Christ's divinity; the night is the evil of this age. At daybreak will come the Parousia.
- Jacob's refusal to release his opponent until he himself had been blessed signifies that Christ first blessed us by His Incarnation.

- 8 Jacob's wounded thigh signifies bad Christians; indeed, in a way the Church is lamed by some of its own people.

The more well known pattern of Patristic commentary is reflected in the following selection from Augustine.

In City of God 16, 39¹ the angel who wrestled with Jacob is clearly a type of Christ. The angel lost the bout voluntarily to signify the passion of Christ wherein the Jews seemed to overpower him.

Jacob's new name means "one who sees God." Seeing God will eventually be the reward for all holy people.

Jacob was blessed in his offspring who later came to believe in Jesus, and he was lamed in those who would be unbelievers. The major part of Jacob's offspring are symbolized

¹C.C. 48, p. 545.

by the wide part of the thigh muscle; i.e., most Jews do not believe in Jesus.¹

Many of the insights of Augustine mentioned in the above two citations can be found elsewhere in his writings. We will group them here in four categories.

a) The presence of Jesus

In Contra Maximinum 2, 26, 9² Augustine tries to carefully distinguish in what sense Christ can be said to have appeared at Jabbok.³ Christ is symbolized insofar as Jacob's offspring will later seem to prevail over Him,⁴ or insofar as

¹Remarks similar to this passage from City of God are found in Augustine's sermon De Secunda Feria Paschae II, 2-3 (Sancti Aureli Augustini Tractatus sive Sermones Inediti ex Codice Guelferbytno 4096, G. Morin, ed. (Rome, 1930), pp. 37-38.

²O.A. 8, cols. 1132-1133.

³Maximinus notes in his Collatio S. Aug. 26 (P.L. 42, col. 739) that the Son was also seen by Jacob in the form in which He would someday come--i.e., in the form of a man. The wrestling is a symbol of Christ's passion; the name Israel means "a man who sees God." Very briefly, in Contra Judaeos 11 (J.T.S. 20 [1919], p. 309), he mentions that Jacob saw Christ in the form of a man. See A. Spagnolo and C. Turner, "Contra Judaeos," Journal of Theological Studies, 20 (1919), 293-310.

⁴Augustine notes the unbelief of later Jews on several occasions. In Sermon 122, 3 (O.A. 5.1, cols. 861-862) we read that this wrestling bout was a mysterium, a sacramentum, a prophetia, and a figura. Christ was prefigured in the angel's losing, a losing which was voluntary. In the same way Jesus was not angry at the Jews when He was crucified. Jacob remains lame in his unbelieving offspring, and so on.

In his commentary on Psalms 44, sect. 20 (C.C. 38, p. 508) we read that the offspring of Jacob are blessed if they come to believe in Christ. In his remarks on Psalms 76, sect. 22 (C.C. 39, p. 1065) Augustine speaks of the ungrateful

some of Jacob's offspring will see Him face to face, as believers. It would be preferable to speak of the wrestler as an angel and God. God can be in an angel (or in a man), especially when He speaks through that angel or man. Thus Christ was there in figura but not in proprietary; a figura is not a res ipsa.¹

b) The angel's role

In commenting on Psalm 79, sect. 3² Augustine notes that the angel allowed Jacob to win. Jacob's request for a blessing from the vanquished was a great mystery; the angel was physically weak but great in majesty.

Similarly, in Psalm 147, sect. 27,³ we read that God made Jacob wrestle with an angel, in whose person God Himself

majority of Jews whose faith is vain and useless. Both these Psalm remarks are clearly based on the Jabbok incident.

¹In his Letter 147, 13-16 (C.S.E.L. 44, pp. 285-289) Augustine notes that Jacob and other holy persons have seen Christ at Jabbok and elsewhere insofar as He is man.

In Ps. Augustine Speculum 2 (C.S.E.L. 12, pp. 299-300) the Jabbok account is cited, without further commentary, in a listing of biblical theophanies. This second chapter title indicates that the collected passages show the distinction of persons in the Trinity. Perhaps for the unknown author the Jabbok incident involved Christ alone, but we have no firm proof of this one way or the other. Another Ps. Augustine work, Testimonia de Patre et Filio et Spiritu Sancto 2, 3 (D. De Bruyne, "Un Florilège Biblique Inédit," Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft, 29 (1930), 197-208; here p. 204), has a similar listing with a similar title and no additional commentary.

²C.C. 39, pp. 1112-1113.

³C.C. 40, p. 2163.

wrestled. The angel allowed himself to be beaten out of mercy, not weakness.

c) The meaning of the names

Augustine was particularly taken with the idea that the meaning of the name Israel prefigures the eventual condition of all holy people. He notes¹ that the name Israel is not used exclusively after Jabbok. The name Israel refers to the later age when we shall see God. We are Jacob in re, Israel in spe.²

In Psalm 83, sect. 12³ Augustine prays to God, "Make me Israel." He asks, "When shall I become Israel?" and replies, "When God will appear. . . ." In Psalm 146, sect. 4⁴ we read that the angels are like Israel in that they see God now; He is a wonderful vision for them.⁵

d) Other remarks concerning Jacob

In Sermon 4, 15⁶ we learn that Jacob was tried and

¹Sermon 122, 4 (O.A. 5.1, cols. 862-863).

²Much the same idea can be found in Quaest. Gen. 114 (C.C. 33, p. 42) and in his remarks on Psalm 77, sect. 44 (C.C. 39, p. 1096).

³C.C. 39, p. 1158.

⁴C.C. 40, p. 2124.

⁵More allusions on this idea of seeing God can be found in Psalm 145, sect. 11 (C.C. 40, p. 2113); Psalm 49, sect. 14 (C.C. 38, p. 587); and Psalm 77, sect. 7 (C.C. 39, p. 1071).

⁶C.C. 41, p. 31.

blessed at Jabbok because he was without deceit. In his remarks on Psalm 147, sect. 27¹ Augustine notes that Jacob fought so valiantly because, as Matthew says,² the kingdom is taken by force. Further, a man appreciates more something for which he has to make effort. In Sermo Caillau-St. Yves 11, 60, 6³ Augustine notes that no one before the Good Thief had ever been so clearly promised entrance into heaven. When Jacob wrestled an angel in the form of a man and claimed to have seen God, even he received no such promise.

Much of Augustine's treatment of the Jabbok passage is different from his handling of the Mamre theophany, yet the apologetic basis is still there. While Augustine does not involve the Trinity (as he could have), this opponent necessarily prefigures Christ as must every Old Testament event.⁴ As in his Mamre commentary, he takes pains to be precise in describing the exact relationships between God and the angel.

The ecclesial allegories involving Jacob and the name Israel are not found in other writers. Pontet claims that Augustine found the Church more clearly prefigured in the Old Testament than he did Jesus himself.⁵ The allegory that the

¹C.C. 40, p. 2163.

²Matthew 11, 12.

³P.L. Supp. 2, col. 1077.

⁴Keyes, p. 118; Pontet, p. 318.

⁵Page 585.

Church is "lame" (by having bad members in it) could be a reaction against Donatist ideals. Augustine's anti-Jewish remarks are also part of a pattern.¹

Among the allegories and sermon illustration types I want to mention the one about Christ being equal to the Father. This could have come to Augustine from his mentor Ambrose.

F. Western Writers after Augustine

To round out our survey, we shall include here fifteen Christian writers after Augustine. Many of these commentators deal with Christ's presence at Jabbok, or with familiar allegories and "sermon illustration" typologies, some of which are anti-Jewish. Only Arnobius the younger seems to propose Jacob as a model for us to imitate.

Africa

1. Quodvultdeus (writing c. 440-450) has a short commentary on our passage in De Promissionibus 1, 24, 33.² Jacob had a holy struggle with an angel, who let himself be beaten. Jacob's lameness is a sign of Jewish unbelief; the name Israel means "one who sees God."

Italy

2. Arnobius the younger (d. c. 450) notes³ that he

¹Pontet, pp. 379-383.

²P.L. 51, col. 752.

³On Psalm 148 (P.L. 53, col. 567).



who, like Jacob, advances in long-suffering and in faith is worthy of seeing God face to face; such a person would be a new Israel, a new "seer of God."

3. Epiphanius (c. 500) also mentions that Israel means "a man who sees God." When Jesus later lived on earth, the Jews as a people truly saw God.¹

4. Rusticus² (d. 565) observes that Jacob wrestled with a man but called the place "face of God." The Holy Spirit had revealed to Jacob this mystery of embodiment (humanationis sacramentum). The two wrestled all night and separated at dawn; this means that the enemies of Christ are in darkness of heart and mind, while those who love Him are in the light.

5. Cassiodorus' (d. 580) comments on Psalm 44, 4³ "You are my king and my God who ordains victories for Jacob," relate this to our Lord and Saviour Jesus who brought victory to Jacob when He had him fight an angel in glorious combat. Jesus "ordained" the victory by helping by means of the angel; we can see this in the instance when Jacob was given a new name. Elsewhere Cassiodorus briefly mentions Jacob's lameness

¹Interpretatio Evang. 4 (Sancti Epiphanii Episcopi Interpretatio Evangelorum, A. Erikson, Lund, 1939, p. 5).

²Sermon 54, Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum 1.3, E. Schwartz, Berlin, 1929, p. 150.

³On Psalm 43, 5 (C.C. 97, pp. 393-394).

and how it symbolizes Jewish unbelief in Jesus.¹

6. Gregory the Great (writing 595-601) developed allegories from the Jabbok account solely in regard to spiritual endeavor. His main comment was in Homily on Ezekiel 2, 2, 12-13.²

12 The contemplative life involves much mental effort. Look at Jacob wrestling with the angel; now Jacob was on the aggressive, now on the defensive. The angel represents God: Jacob represents those perfect people who seek a life of contemplation. The "angel" is in a sense "conquered" when God is comprehended by an intimate contemplative (*intellectu intimo*).

13 Jacob was lamed when his thigh nerve was burned. So too our carnal desires wither when we seek to know God in desire and in mind. Jacob's two legs stand for seeking God and holding on to earthly things; whenever we succeed in seeking God our love of the world must be diminished, and so we limp.³

Later in the same book⁴ the topic is the perseverance and strength needed in the pursuit of virtue. Think of Jacob who was exercised to such a level that he could not be overwhelmed by a fighting angel!

In Moralium Job 23, 12⁵ we learn that the contact

¹On Psalm 17, 46 (English, Psalm 18, 45. C.C. 97, p. 167) and on Romans 11, 25 (P.L. 68, col. 492).

²C.C. 142, pp. 232-233.

³In Moralium Job 4, 67 (P.L. 75, col. 674) the example of Jacob's limping is related to the virtue of detachment. He who contemplates higher things does not know how to proceed with lower desires; he loses his bodily boldness as he gains in mental power.

⁴2, 3, 21 (C.C. 142, p. 252).

⁵P.L. 76, cols. 292-293.

which we may have with God in contemplation is not a firm and permanent vision, but only a quasi vision which we might call a "face" of God. Jacob used this phrase to describe what he had experienced at Jabbok. Elsewhere¹ it is said that patriarchs and others who claim to have seen God do so only by means of forms; they do not attain to the power of God's essence. Thus Jacob only saw God in an angel.²

France

7. Cyprian of Gaul (early 5th cent.)³ writes that Jacob struggled with a wrestling God; in fact, he had seen the lofty features of God. The name Israel means "one perceiving the Lord." Cyprian used no allegories in his poetry on this passage.⁴

8. John Cassian (d. c. 435) in De Incarnatione 7, 9⁵

¹18, 88 (P.L. 76, col. 92).

²Material rather imitative of Gregory can be found in De Expos. Vet. ac Nov. Test. I in Gen. 66-68, written by Paterius, a disciple of Gregory (P.L. 79, cols. 716-718). Julian of Toledo (d. 690) repeats the Moralium Job 18, 88 statements in his Antikeimenon 1, 20 (P.L. 96, col. 604).

³Heptateuchos, Genesis lines 1035-1050 (C.S.E.L. 23, pp. 39-40).

⁴In Cyprian's Coena, 67 (P.L. 4, col. 1014) Jacob is described as being in an embrace; this could refer to the wrestling match at Jabbok, but the context does not offer any assistance for interpretation.

⁵C.S.E.L. 17, pp. 364-366. Owen Chadwick, in John Cassian, 2nd ed. (Cambridge University Press, 1968), pp. 138-147, explains that the refutation of Nestorius' Christological theories was the occasion for the composition of this work. Cassian used well known biblical arguments to prove Christ's divinity and individuality.

denies that Jesus was or is in any way "hidden" in the Father. He was not hidden even prior to His Incarnation. For example, Jacob wrestled with Christ at the Jabbok; Jacob saw a man but he spoke of God, whom he had seen with inner eyes. God was preparing men for the Incarnation by events such as this wrestling match.

9. Eucherius of Lyons (writing 428) explains that men such as Moses and Jacob did not see God in the glory of His majesty but in the lesser image of divine power which can be moderated to human limitations.¹

10. Eusebius of Gaul (second half of 5th cent.) dwells on the heavenly athlete who wrestled with Jacob.² He lost in order to rise more glorious; He fell to elevate others. At this time He battles with foes in the arena of the world.

Jacob represents the Jews; the angel represents Jesus. The angel being overpowered symbolizes Christ suffering at the hands of the Jews. As the angel gave a blessing, so also Jesus prayed for His executioners. Many Jews disbelieved; this was foretold by the laming of the wide part of the thigh muscle. Another interpretation is that Jacob limped on his foot (that part of the Jewish people who did not believe in Jesus after He rose from the dead).³

¹Instructionum 1, 24 (C.S.E.L. 31, pp. 73-74).

²Homily 21 (De Pascha, 10), 3-4 (C.C. 101, pp. 248-250).

³In Homily 35, 4, on St. Maximus, (C.C. 101, p. 403), Eusebius notes that Maximus, like Jacob, sweated during his spiritual wrestling matches.

11. Caesarius of Arle (d. 542) in Sermon 88, 5¹ makes some of the now familiar charges about Jacob's descendants. Assuming that the opponent was an angel who symbolized Christ, then the wrestling signifies Jewish persecution of Jesus; Jacob's lameness represents Jewish unbelief, and so on. One new allegory is that the dawn becomes a symbol of Christ's resurrection, which took place very early in the morning.

Spain

12. Apringius (mid 6th cent.) in commenting on Rev. 19, 12, ". . . he has a name inscribed which no one knows but himself," notes that neither would Jacob's opponent reveal his name.²

13. Isadore of Seville (writing c. 624) notes³ that the terms man and God are both used in the Jabbok account. Similar events in the lives of Joshua, Gideon, and others lead to the conclusion that the opponent of Jacob was actually God and Lord.

Elsewhere the visitor is more clearly identified as Jesus. In Liber de var. Quaest. 17, 2⁴ we see that such ap-

¹C.C. 103, p. 364.

²See Marius Férotin, Tractatus in Apocalypsin, Bibliothèque Patrologique 1 (Paris, 1900), sect. 5, p. 58.

³Liber de variis Quaest. 16, 2-3. A. C. Vega, A. E. Anspach, Scriptores Ecclesiastici Hispano-Latini Veteris et Medii Aevi fasc. 6-9, Spain, 1940, pp. 44-45.

⁴Pages 48-49.

pearances involved Jesus as a man; later He would come into the world truly Incarnate.¹

The name Israel means "one who sees God" and is based on Jacob's having seen God at Jabbok.² The wrestler's losing signifies Christ's crucifixion,³ and the lameness of Jacob represents Jewish unbelief.⁴

14. Beatus of Liebana (writing 776-786) notes that the name Israel means "a man who sees God."⁵

England

Bede (674-735) mentions the meaning of "a man seeing God" for Israel,⁶ and that Jacob's lameness signifies Jewish persecution of Jesus, and that the blessing of Jacob represents the blessing of those Jews who come to believe in Jesus.⁷

¹21, 1 of the same book (p. 57) has similar reasoning, as does Quaestiones in Genesim 5, 27 (P.L. 83, col. 266).

²So Quaest. in Gen. 5, 27 and Etymologiarum 7, 7, 6. See W. Lindsay, Isadori Hispanensis Episcopi Etymologiarum sive Originum Libri XX (Oxford: Clarendon, 1911).

³Quaest. in Gen. 5, 27 and Lib. de var. Quaest. 17, 2.

⁴Quaest. in Gen. 5, 27.

⁵In Apocalipsin Libri XII, 2, Prologue, 5 (H. A. Sanders, Beati in Apocalipsin libri 12, American Academy in Rome, 1930, p. 110).

⁶In Lucam I (C.C. 120, p. 25).

⁷On First Samuel, 2 (in regard to 1 Sam. 10, 23), C.C. 119.

Excursus

The oldest Christian representation we have of a Jabbok scene is a relief carving on a small ivory relic casket (lipsanoteca) from Brescia, Italy. This dates from the fifth century.¹ The whole panel displays different deliverance themes. In the section of interest to us a robed man and Jacob have their arms crossed in a wrestling posture. The man's right hand is touching the inside of Jacob's thigh near the knee. There is no background scenery in this carving. Unfortunately, Jacob's head has been broken off; it was in high relief and must have been hit at some time.

Next we have two illuminations in the sixth century Vienna Genesis, the oldest extant illuminated Christian manuscript.² In the first picture the movement of the figures is clockwise from the upper left. Jacob and his entourage cross a stone bridge over the river. At the lower right, next to the stream, Jacob wrestles a man who wears a long white garment. Both men are erect, with arms clasped. Further to the left the man in white has his hand on Jacob's bowed head in blessing, as both stand near each other.

¹There is a black and white photograph in Grabar's Christian Iconography (Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 336. The subject is located on the lower right edge of the right end panel of the casket.

²Black and white photographs can be seen in Die Wiener Genesis, W. R. von Hartel and Franz Wickhoff (Vienna, 1895). The plates are nn. 23 and 24, with an explanation on p. 153. Color photographs are in H. Gerstinger's Die Wiener Genesis (Vienna, 1931), pls. 23 and 24.

In the second Vienna Genesis picture there are three scenes clockwise from the upper left. In that area Jacob and a man in white clothing converse. To the upper right Jacob is being blessed much as in the first picture. Below these two scenes we see a third in which a bright-rayed sun shines on Jacob as he walks.

There is an eighth century fresco in Santa Maria Antiqua in Rome which depicts an angel dealing with Jacob. Jacob is kneeling and seeking a blessing from the angel, who has not yet moved his arm and hand to the posture for blessing. To Jacob's left is the inscription, "Ubi Jacob luctatur cum angelo ut benedicatur."¹

From the ninth century we have a French illumination.² In this representation an outsized, haloed, winged angel grasps for Jacob's upper right thigh with his left arm. Jacob tries to fend off the angel by pushing at both his shoulders.

Use of an angelic figure as the opponent persists. We have a scene of Jacob and an angel, with arms clasped, in a

¹I have not been able to find any photographs of this work. The description given here is from p. 705 of vol. 2 of Wilpert's four volume work. Apparently the angel is badly damaged above the chest.

²The manuscript is Ms. Gr. 510, fol. 174, which is dated around 880 A.D. See Henri Omont Miniatures des Plus Anciens Manuscrits Grecs de la Bibliothèque Nationale du VI au XIV Siècle (Paris: Champion, 1929), plate XXXVII and p. 23. A black and white plate of this is in Goodenough, vol. 11, fig. 296.

thirteenth century illumination,¹ but we are going beyond the time scope of our research.

Examination of the Christian artistic representations of Jacob at the Jabbok leads one to compare them to the Mamre works. As at Mamre, an angel eventually replaces the human figure of the biblical text. The only time the opponent is haloed is in the French manuscript. Further, it seems that any of these human or angelic figures could have been meant to symbolize Jesus. The artists were able to be more vague and subtle about this than most Patristic writers.

Clearly the Jabbok incident received less attention in church art than did Mamre. Our examples include a small lipsanoteca, one mural, and three or four manuscript illuminations, whereas the Mamre theme was prominently displayed in Ravenna and grew to be the major Byzantine exemplar of the Trinity.

Except for the Vienna Genesis and the 1250 A.D. miniature scenes, the artistic representations of the Jabbok story include no people or objects which could help one to appreciate the context of the story. Nor do we find any attempts

¹See S. C. Cockerell and John Plummer, Old Testament Miniatures (New York: Braziller, 1969), pl. 30. The manuscript has very vivid colors and dates from about 1250 A.D. This picture includes much more detail than most. We see Jacob's family and flocks preceding him and, further to the right, we see Jacob and Esau meeting amicably.

Reau mentions several church frescos and bas reliefs from the eleventh and twelfth centuries. I examined only the miniature in Cockerell's collection because it was easily available.

to weave in any of the typological or allegorical motifs mentioned in the written sources. Even the physical encounter of Jacob and his opponent is portrayed in rather static forms. The most spirited wrestling occurs in the French manuscript.

Conclusions to Chapter IV

Let us review the Patristic commentary on Jabbok in light of the eight guidelines which we established in the second chapter.

1. We proposed that Old Testament events acquired significance for early Christians in relation to, or as foretastes of, Christ's later accomplishments. The great majority of our Patristic sources considered Christ to have been the subject of the theophany at Jabbok in some manner. A few, such as the Antiocheans and Jerome, were less specific or favored speaking only of an angel.

2. We assumed that the literary contexts of an Old Testament passage need not be as important to the Fathers as typological considerations of it. Only a few Fathers showed interest in the immediate literary context of the Jabbok story. Only Justin, Tertullian, and Jerome derived the name Israel in ways consistent with the Hebrew account. Only Chrysostom, Theodoret, and Jerome clearly brought Jacob's fear of Esau into their considerations as to why God brought about the wrestling at all.

3. In addition to looking for types and allegories

5

which related Old Testament passages to the life of Christ, we also planned to look for ones which helped to explain the life of the Church. Some of the Patristic Jabbok commentary was Church oriented. The frequent allegorical exhortations to spiritual asceticism were directed to the faithful, as was the standard anti-Jewish thinking so frequent in our sources. Only Augustine asked Christians to see themselves in the lame patriarch, and that in just one passage.

4. We expected the early Fathers to mix together historical types, sermon illustration types, and allegories. There were very few historical types to be found in the Patristic material on this passage. Justin mentioned the fact that Jesus, in his earthly life, changed the names of Peter and the sons of Zebedee. He also mentioned that Jesus struggled with the devil at the start of his public life. No Father after Justin mentioned either of these potential New Testament parallels again.

5. We held that Philo's allegories were frequently imitated by Christian writers. Origen, Ambrose, and Gregory the Great were obvious imitators. Origen, Procopius, and Jerome got so far afield at times in using spiritual allegory that they had to have two or three different opponents for Jacob to wrestle.

6. We anticipated differences in interpretation between the Alexandrian and Antiochean schools. Chrysostom and Theodoret were very much interested in the literal intent of

the passage. Jerome was so inclined most of the time. Their efforts were clearly in the minority. Indeed, Patristic commentary ignored almost all the particularity of the story.

There were almost no depictions of the actual arrival and appearance of the stranger, no recountings of the sweaty, dusty thrashing about in the dark, no appreciation of the courageous determination of Jacob not to release his opponent.

Christian commentators were satisfied with the idea that Jacob in some way saw God; they were not interested in the fact that wrestling is a very unusual way to see someone. Few Christians referred to the sciatic nerve prohibition at all, and none showed interest in Jewish practice in this regard.

7. We mentioned that some events in the life of Jacob engendered comment that he was a type of Christ. He was not seen as a historical type of Jesus in our Jabbok sources. In fact only rarely was he the subject of positive sermon illustration typology or of positive allegory, aside from the general observation that he had in some sense seen God.

8. We assumed that biblical passages served as proofs in discussions of other doctrines or aspects of theology as well as of those directly involving Christ. The Jabbok passage was involved in very few doctrinal proofs, aside from the frequent assertions that the pre-Incarnate Christ was present. Tertullian used it in one place to discuss the works of angels, and Ambrose and Augustine briefly digressed on the divinity of Jesus.

Reflecting on the Patristic and Alexandrian Jewish use of the Jabbok story in light of the hermeneutical modes and rules suggested by Sanders, we again find that this material followed the same general patterns as the Rabbinic writings.

With the exception of the few literal commentators who assumed that Jacob was very afraid of Esau, our other sources did not question Jacob's personal worthiness in the course of their remarks on the Jabbok event. Most of the Christian writers focused so exclusively upon Jabbok as another Christophany that a theologizing hermeneutic was impossible.

Most of our sources rather drew lessons for the faithful; i.e., they employed a moralizing hermeneutic. These lessons, whether involving doctrines about Jesus, angels, the Church, or the like, were supportative or constitutive in intent.

Conclusions

At the beginning of this dissertation I proposed that a study of the history of early hermeneutic of some biblical passages could be helpful for our own practice of the art of hermeneutic. At this point I want to explain some of the ways in which this historical study can help us as we try to draw out authentic relationships between the content and contexts of biblical passages and the life situations and systems of thought of present day congregations.

A sampling of ancient biblical commentary can help us to view modern commentary from new perspectives and to evaluate it accordingly. For example, many twentieth century exegetes, with their interest in pre-literary versions of the Mamre account, postulate that originally Jahweh was not clearly identified in vv. 1 or 3. The ancient Rabbis, who did not consider the question of pre-literary traditions, reflected on the love manifested by Jahweh in His appearance to Abraham. They accepted the identifications in the early verses without hesitation. On this complex passage, with its frequent changes of speakers, their explanations involving the Shekinah and the three angels can be said to complement the intent of the Jahwist's story as we have it in the MT. For that matter, the Patristic explanations that Christ or the entire Trinity was the subject of the Mamre theophany also represent their concern with the complete Genesis account.¹ Perhaps our own hermeneutical references to Mamre should likewise concentrate on the story in its entirety.

To take another instance, modern exegesis of the Jabbok account is understandably divided as to whether it involves a genuine theophany or an angelophany, since the account is ambiguous. This division has its counterpart in ancient Christian and Jewish commentary; most of our Jewish

¹Philo, Chrysostom, and Augustine emphasize repeatedly that Abraham and Sarah only gradually became aware of the other than human status of the three visitors.

sources spoke of an angel, while many of our Christian sources considered the Jabbok encounter as a theophany (or, more exactly, a Christophany). We do well to be aware of the history behind the two current interpretations.

Another benefit which can be derived from researching a history of Old Testament hermeneutics is that we may be better able to work with an individual modern commentary. I found it helpful to know that Benno Jacob's remarks on Mamre were not representative of ancient Rabbinic material. On the other hand, his comments on the relationship of Jacob to Esau, and on Jacob as an ancestor upon whom we should model our lives, do reflect earlier Rabbinic lines of thought.

We may certainly employ some of the ancient hermeneutical remarks to supplement the principal achievements of modern exegesis. If one of the main thrusts of the Mamre story is to honor the virtue of hospitality, then Rabbinic developments of that virtue, such as their descriptions of the food served or of the merits Abraham earned there, are truly in harmony with this thrust. By the same token, God's initiative and loving power at Mamre are also highlighted by some of the Rabbinic commentary. The early Christians, in their own way, also dwell on God's loving actions at Mamre although they do not conceive of hospitality in the same way as the Jewish commentators did.

So also, if the main theme of the Jabbok event is God's initiatives and the complex of Jacob's human traits,

then the ancient Jewish and Christian sources do center at times on God's initiatives and Jacob's virtues, although they do not at the same time profile Jacob's shortcomings.

The hermeneutical categories of Daniel Patte for Jewish material, and of Jean Daniélou, R. P. C. Hanson, et al., for Patristic material were adequate tools for this beginner.

The Rabbinic materials did bear out the norms laid down by Patte. In the Mamre and Jabbok commentary we found extensive use of other biblical citations. Many of them helped us to be more aware of the larger Genesis contexts into which these events in the lives of Abraham, Sarah, and Jacob must be placed. Other citations may have been dependent upon the Genesis stories in some way, while a third group of cross references were quite remotely related by verbal or other formal characteristics.¹

The two passages were also subject to a certain amount of telescoping, and to a great extent the patriarchs were advanced as moral examples for our imitation. The sciatic nerve prohibition became the object of a considerable amount of legislation over the years, some of which entailed further study of the Jabbok story.

The scope of Rabbinic hermeneutic of these two passages was mostly restricted to cultural changes, changes in

¹This threefold subdivision of Rabbinic biblical citations is my own, but I would not have been able to arrive at it without Patte's efforts.

everyday life, laws, current ideas and ways of thinking, folklore, and so on. The few brief references to Rome, Hadrian's persecution, the Princes in Israel, and so on, only served to underscore the general absence of references to salient events contemporary to the Rabbis.

Our eight guidelines to the Christian material were also applicable in both passages. At Mamre and at Jabbok the presence of the pre-Incarnate Christ (or the Trinity, in some Mamre commentary) invested the stories with relevance for early Christians. Christian commentary was substantially less oriented toward considering Genesis contexts than was the Jewish. Ecclesial allegories were frequent, perhaps the most notable being Chrysostom's consideration of Mamre as an example of Abraham's charity. Historical typologies between events in the lives of Abraham, Jacob, and Jesus were not often drawn out, although we did have a good amount of sermon illustration typology and spiritual allegory. Philo's writings were much imitated and adapted by Christian writers. In both cases, the Antiochean analyses were more often concerned with literal understandings than was the Alexandrian. Neither Abraham nor Jacob were seen as types of Jesus Himself in these passages. Elements of both stories were used in the formulation of Christian doctrines.

The categories of James Sanders assisted us to some extent in gaining an overview of our hermeneutical materials. There was relatively little Jewish or Christian consideration

of the human faults of the two patriarchs and Sarah. In most of the sources they were depicted as quite worthy recipients of God's favors. Much of the hermeneutic we have examined was constitutive; it was used to encourage believers to greater interior devotion or to the practice of virtues. Only rarely did we find challenging remarks such as Chrysostom's ideas on almsgiving. Before using or imitating points in any of these sources we should be aware of these larger hermeneutical trends.

We should also admit that such Rabbinic and Patristic constitutive hermeneutic was authentic in itself. For Jewish audiences hearing about the Mamre or Jabbok events, the way everything took place and echoed throughout the Scriptures gave credit to God. Comments on the Jabbok encounter encouraged them to reflect on their destiny as a Chosen People. The remarks of the early Christians revealed the various pre-conceptions with which they read the Old Testament. These remarks may not have represented as uniform a culture as that of the Jews and they may not have been in close harmony with the range of biblical Hebrew meanings at times, but they did point to the initiative and power of God. An appreciation of the sincerity behind such constitutive hermeneutic as we have come across in this research can help us to see beyond Sanders' emphasis on prophetic hermeneutic in the IDB Supplement article. This caveat, that Sanders does not offer many examples of con-

stitutive hermeneutic, is my only criticism of his article on hermeneutics.

The fact that many of these ancient insights were of a constitutive sort need not in any way deter us from using them. I have personally employed the Rabbis' remarks about the extent of Abraham's large and fancy meal in homilies on hospitality, and about God's white lie to cover over Sarah's remark about Abraham in homilies on married life. Both applications have proved effective.

I find it difficult to go beyond the basic patterns of Sanders in any attempt to find commonalities in the Jewish and Christian sources. It is obvious that much of the Christian commentary did not include references to salient current events; the Jewish material also exhibited this same tendency. The reasons for such omissions may not have been the same in both cases. Jews and Christians usually understood the nature of Jacob's opponent in different ways (angelophany or Christophany) but, given the difference in belief about the nature of God in the two systems, one could say that in either case God was seen as truly intervening in the life of Jacob in some mysterious way.

To put it another way, the belief systems of each faith weigh heavily in the larger picture. Thus ancient Christian use of a pre-Incarnate Christ or Jewish use of angels or of a food law such as the sciatic nerve prohibition

26.

are such complex vehicles that one would have to study other Genesis passages--ones not involving mysterious appearances such as these--in order to gain more insights into how Scripture functioned for these two peoples. We must be careful not to draw too many broad conclusions from our study of the ancient Jewish and Christian use of these two passages. We have looked at only two brief similar passages from the same book, and those for a limited time period. We have not integrated our findings into any larger analysis of Judaism or Christianity, since to do so would be impractical in a study of this length. Obviously skilled biblical, Rabbinics, and Patristics scholars such as Childs, Vermes, and Daniélou are capable of such integrations.

I must indicate my personal preference for some of the ancient Jewish commentary on our passages. Credit should be given the Rabbis for their careful scrutiny of the texts. Such attention to the details of the personal generous hospitality and enthusiasm of Abraham and Sarah, the initial reactions of Sarah, Jacob's intense struggle with his powerful opponent, and his insistence on receiving a blessing, indicate a high degree of devotion to God's word. The vividness and boldness of much of their hermeneutic should encourage contemporary homilists to be more forceful in their own presentations.

The ancient Christian commentators undervalue the literal particularity of the stories. We find much less study of

larger Genesis contexts, of the full image of Abraham and Sarah formed from all their acts of hospitality, of the wonder caused by the startling message to a very elderly couple, of the extent of Sarah's doubts, and so on. The Christians reflect less frequently than the Rabbis on Jacob's courage and his trials, on his determination to receive a blessing, and so on.

The mention of scholars such as Vermes and Daniélou, and of my own beginner's impression that the Rabbinic materials are very vigorous at times, leads me to perhaps the most important conclusion in this paper.

Simply put, it is that each person called to do hermeneutics should find what values he can in the history of the art. Few of us will ever be able to do full time work in this area, but any research in the history of hermeneutics will inevitably be reflected in the quality of sermons or homilies. Any experience gained in consulting such materials of the time period covered by this paper or later centuries will contribute to a deeper appreciation of the continuities of humanity over the years. One may find insights in Rabbinic materials; another perhaps in the insights of one of the Fathers; someone else may approach these materials from an interest in a particular doctrine or aspect of church or synagogue life, Jewish or Christian art, or whatever. Over a long period of time insights so gained will enhance hermeneutical endeavors because

they will sensitize the homilist to the life situations and systems of thought of the people of God through the centuries.¹

¹In the short run, biblical scholars, students, and homilists need improved reference systems. The Biblia Patristica series is an important advance. It would be very helpful for everyone if Hyman's three volumes were updated and printed in English. If they were republished in this manner they, along with Biblia Patristica, would be the basic reference tool for the early centuries of the history of hermeneutic. The article by Townsend on ancient Rabbinic sources, and a companion article on medieval Jewish writings in the second volume of the A.D.L. series, are invaluable bibliographic aids for the non-specialist who wishes to track down specific Jewish writings. These should be updated every decade or so. Patristics scholars should see to it that a comparable set of directives be made available for those interested in the vast treasures of the ancient and medieval Christian world.

Overviews of the history of hermeneutics such as Brevard Childs provides in his Exodus are ideal, but obviously very difficult to produce. Perhaps more experimenting can be done with the format of such presentations. The expositions which I made in the four chapters of this dissertation are entirely my own and are most likely too ad hoc to be helpful in the field. I am convinced, however, that the only effective control or basis for scholarly, historical presentations lies in the consultation of all the references available for the particular texts and time periods. Perhaps historical studies of this sort could best be produced by small teams of scholars.

APPENDIX I
JEWISH TRANSLATIONS AND TARGUMS
OF GENESIS 18, 1-16

In this appendix we will present observations on the ancient versions and Targums¹ in a more detailed fashion than was the case in the synopsis and chart of Chapter I.

We will begin with the Septuagint, which probably goes back to the 3rd century B.C.² This Greek translation, as Bowker notes,³ makes every effort to explain words and phrases which might be unclear, to avoid anthropomorphisms, to avoid leaving ambiguities in the larger context of the passage, and even occasionally to change a phrase for doctrinal purposes. The later more literal Greek versions of Aquila and Symmachus will receive some mention in the appropriate locations.

¹Remembering with Patte (p. 53) that, "... in the Targum as well as in the Midrash the starting point of the interpretation is not necessarily the text in itself. Often it is the text as traditionally interpreted. In other words, what the Targum is expressing in Aramaic is not Scripture by itself, but Scripture as already interpreted in the Synagogue."

²H. B. Swete, An Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek (Cambridge University Press, 1902; reprint by Ktav, 1968), p. 21.

³John Bowker, The Targums and Rabbinic Literature, p. 5.

In verse 1, the time of the visit is more defined by μεσημβρίας.

With the MT, the LXX assumes that God (κύριε) is being addressed in verse 3.

In verse 4, the imperative "wash your feet" is modified to the jussive "let your feet be washed."

The MT phrase "a little water" becomes simply "water."¹

By the same token, the MT "a bit of bread" in v. 5 becomes simply "bread."

"Refresh your hearts" finds its less ornate equivalent in φάγεσθε .

In verse 6 the D^{NKD} become the less specific μέτρα, and the two words designating the flour (ηλο πμκ) are rendered by the one word σεμιδάλεως. Aquila and Symmachus² speak of three σάτα . A few other texts specify that it is wheaten flour (ἀλεούρου) and locate the verb φύρασον exactly as the MT does, at the midpoint of the string of imperatives and without an object.

In verse 8, the LXX moves και ἐφάγοσαν to an earlier

¹According to Wever's apparatus, only a few manuscripts follow the MT on this point.

²More literal Greek Jewish translations from about 130 and 200 A.D., respectively; so B. J. Roberts, The Old Testament Texts and Versions (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1951), pp. 123 and 126.

position in the sentence than we have in the MT.¹

In verse 9 the LXX has one person ask Abraham about Sarah. No other Targum or version will join LXX in this change, except for some copies of Ps.-Jonathan. In verse 10 (and 14) the difficult כעת חיה² is rendered εἰς ὥρας meaning "at this time a year from now" or "at this time in the proper season."

The LXX says that the door (where Sarah was) was behind the one speaking to Abraham.

In verse 12, Aquila renders בקרבה with the very literal ἐν ἐγκατῶ αὐτῆς .

Aquila's translation of Sarah's remark, "After I am worn out, shall I have pleasure?" and Symmachus' "After I have become old, shall I have strength (ἀκμή)?" are much closer to the MT than the LXX paraphrase, "This has not happened to me up till now." We cannot, however, decide on the Hebrew Vorlag for the LXX in this case.

In verse 13, Sarah was said to laugh ἐν ἑαυτῇ, a detail apparently repeated from verse 12.

In verse 16 Gomorrah is mentioned. We shall see that

¹According to Wever's apparatus, quite a few manuscripts follow the MT in regard to the position of this verb.

²"The living time" or "the time of living"; Speiser suggests "at about a life's interval," meaning at the end of a term of pregnancy. Cf. E. A. Speiser, Genesis, p. 130 and O. Eissfeldt, The Old Testament, an Introduction, P. Ackroyd, trans. (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. 743, for further bibliography on this term.

this city is mentioned earlier in the story in Targums Neofiti, Fragmentary, and Ps.-Jonathan.

Let us note some patterns of the LXX. There are attempts to clarify, such as μεσημβρινᾶς in v. 1 and εἰς ὥρας in vv. 10 and 14, and the description of the location of the door behind the speaker of v. 10. More frequently we find simplifications:

thus v. 4 water,

v. 5 bread . . . eat,

v. 6 measures . . . fine flour,

v. 12 "This has not happened to me up till now" (perhaps a more modest remark, to the Greek mind).

Some changes may have been prompted by a desire to give the account a better flow:

thus v. 4 "let your feet be washed" being in the same form as "let water be brought,"

v. 8 the relocation of "and they ate," to immediately follow the description of his setting the food down,

v. 9 the single speaker could be presumed to be the same as the speaker in following verse 10,

v. 13 the ἐν ἐαυτῇ leaves no doubt that the visitor knows a lot about Sarah.

The Aramaic Targums, given from memory only, after each verse or couple of verses of the readings during Synagogue services, became necessary as time went on due to the rise of Aramaic (and to some extent Greek) as the spoken language of a substantial part of the Jewish faithful. These recitations were not intended to be literal translations but

rather translations which would bring clarity of understanding to the members of the congregations. This interest in having the Scriptures clearly understood was not confined to the words themselves but extended to making the spiritual message meaningful for the present. The Targums then attempt to do more than a translation such as the LXX, while not becoming radical retellings of Scripture, such as Jubilees, or Genesis Apochryphon or the like. They make an attempt to represent the text verse by verse but at the same time they introduce into it extensive and often far-ranging interpretations.¹

There was no feeling that the text was being altered or changed, since the text had already been read; the purpose of the Targum was to make the text meaningful and to bring home its significance to the congregation.² The process of selecting proper Targumic comments and of teaching new generations of תורגמנים shows the Jewish genius for unity in diversity. The Targum traditions³ represent the middle of the stream of Rabbinic interpretations; more eclectic commentary found its way into other writings.

What we have in the later written copies of the Targums would then be "isolated moments"⁴ from the continuous

¹Bowker, p. 9 and preceding.

²Bowker, p. 13.

³Bowker prefers the plural, p. 15.

⁴Bowker, p. 15.

Targum process. Another consequence of this, as Sperber notes,¹ should be a realization that variant readings from different manuscripts of a Targum may be of almost equal value to the so-called critical text. A. Diez-Macho takes a step in this direction in his edition of Targum Neofiti by presenting the marginal and interlinear remarks found on the manuscript in a more prominent format than is usual. I must confess that, except for Targum Neofiti and LXX, I have not made as extensive use of variant readings as would be the ideal.

Let us now examine Targum Neofiti, as an example of the early Palestinian Targum traditions.²

In verse 1 the three visitors are identified as angels, with their specific duties also mentioned. Several cities are mentioned in addition to Sodom. Twice mention is made of Abraham's circumcision, from which he was still recuperating by resting and being warmed in the heat of the day. The "word" of Jahweh was revealed to Abraham in the valley of the "vision." The "vision" probably refers to this very theophany.³

¹A. Sperber, The Bible in Aramaic, 4 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1959), vol. IV B, 414.

²Bowker, pp. 16-20, discusses Diez-Macho's claims for Neofiti as a first or second century A.D. recension of a pre-Christian Targum tradition. Bowker himself opts for a third century date. The Neofiti volumes had not been published at the time of Bowker's book. See A. Diez-Macho, Neophyti 1, Targum Palestinense, Vol. 1 (Madrid: C.S.I.C., 1968).

³M. McNamara, Targum and Testament, p. 198.

In verse 2 we are told that the angels were in the form of men. Abraham does not bow but asks after their health as was the custom (כְּנִימוֹס).¹ The word כְּנִימוֹס, borrowed from the Greek *κνέμις*, evidences an audience somewhat familiar with that language.

In verse 3 Abraham very politely addresses the Lord and refers to the glory of the Shekinah.

In verse 4 Neofiti puts the first two actions of Abraham in the first person singular.

In verse 5 we read that Abraham said that the visitors had come exactly at meal time.

In verse 6 the bread is unleavened.

In verse 8 we are told that the (angelic) visitors seemed to be eating and drinking.

In verse 10 (and 14) כַּעַת חַיָּה is simplified to "at this time." The vague MT phrase about the door becomes "Ishmael was standing near her (Sarah)."

In verse 12 we see that Sarah wondered (root נחם) in her heart. The phrase "to have pleasure" is expanded to ". . . is it possible for me to return to the days of my youth and for me to have pregnancies?" Abraham is then mentioned by name.

¹Bowker, p. 211, speculates that this might be a euphemism used to avoid any hint of idolatry in Abraham's gesture. His remarks were occasioned by a similar variant reading in Fragmentary Targum.

In verse 14 the question becomes "Is it possible to hide anything from before Jahweh?"¹

Let us sum up some of the trends of Targum Neofiti. That the visitors are angels is clearly mentioned in verses 1 and 2, and, by implication from verse 1, an angel seems to do the speaking in verses 10, 14, and 15. Likewise the angels are not bowed to (verse 2) nor do they eat earthly food (verse 8).

Possible anthropomorphisms are avoided in verses 1, 3, and 14. The Shekinah concept is clearly brought in in verse 3, as a separate entity from the three angels. The matter of Abraham's circumcision is brought up. Details are specified in verses 5, 6, and 10, and clarified in verses 10 and 14 (at this time). Sarah's actions and words in verse 12 are elaborated upon.

We will next examine the Fragmentary Targum.²

In verse 1 we see that the three visitors are angels; their specific duties are described. Several cities are mentioned in addition to Sodom. A "word (פֶּתַח) of prophecy from before Jahweh" was revealed to Abraham. The מִימְרָא of

¹Here and in Onkelos and Ps.-Jon. the Targumists used סוד (root II, Jastrow, p. 653) apparently as a clarification or specification of פֶּתַח / פֶּלֶא (Jastrow, p. 1181). See Marcus Jastrow, A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature (New York: Judaica Press, 1971).

²Bowker, pp. 20-21, discusses the two textual traditions involved but does not attempt to date the material. Following Roberts, p. 202, the Fragmentary Targum may be older than Ps.-Jonathan.

Jahweh came to him in the valley of the "vision"¹ as he was recuperating from his recent circumcision.

Verse 2 has a variant addition, "... according to the custom of the land."²

In verse 10 כעת חיה is rendered "at that time when you (pl.) shall revive." Ishmael is depicted as standing by Sarah as she listens.

Verse 12 may be close to Neofiti.³

Obviously the few verses from the Fragmentary Targum are similar to the Palestinian traditions which we have seen in Neofiti and will see again in Ps.-Jonathan.

We should next examine Targum Onkelos. This Targum appears to be closer to being an Aramaic translation than the Palestinian Targums generally, although many haggadic traditions are alluded to in it. Bowker⁴ postulates that its production may have been a part of the general attempt in Judaism from the 2nd century A.D. onward to provide authoritative translations as a safeguard against Christian interpretations of Scripture based on the LXX. Sperber⁵ agrees that, in nar-

¹Again, the "vision" probably refers to this theophany. Cf. M. McNamara, Targum and Testament, p. 198.

²M. Ginsburger, Das Fragmententhargum (Berlin: 1899; reprinted in Jerusalem: Makor, 1968), p. 95.

³Ginsburger, pp. 77 and 95; Bowker, p. 209.

⁴Page 25. For text see A. Berliner, Targum Onkelos (Berlin, 1884; reprinted in Jerusalem: Makor, 1968).

⁵The Bible in Aramaic, vol. 4B, p. 3.

rative portions, Onkelos will move away from a literal translation only for the sake of clarity, or in order to follow "explicit Rabbinic interpretation."

In verse 1, the location is the valley of Mamre.

In verse 3, Jahweh is being addressed.

In verse 10 (and 14) כעת חיה becomes "at the time when you (pl.) shall revive."

In verse 12 (also 13 and 15), Sarah interiorly mocks (root חלל). She asks ". . . shall I have a child (עולמן)?" rather than ". . . shall I have pleasure?"

In verse 14, we again have the question, "Is anything hidden from before Jahweh?"

Targum Ps.-Jonathan is in some ways the latest and most extensive of the Targums. It reflects much of the Palestinian and Onkelos Targum traditions and often adds comments unique to itself (sometimes from non-Targumic Rabbinic traditions).¹

First we will list the items which Targum Ps.-Jonathan has in common with one or more of the preceding Targums and versions.

In verse 1 the "glory of Jahweh" appears to Abraham, who was recuperating from his circumcision.

In verse 2 (and 16) the visitors are three angels in

¹Cf. Roberts, p. 202; Bowker, p. 26. For text see M. Ginsburger, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan ben Uziel zum Pentateuch (Berlin: 1903; reprinted in Jerusalem: Makor, 1968).

the form of men. Their specific duties are described. Gomorrah is mentioned.

In verse 3, Jahweh is addressed, if in a rather devout manner, and the Shekinah concept is employed.

In verse 5, Abraham notes that the visitors have come exactly at meal time.

In verse 8, Abraham serves food as humans do usually and the visitors seemed to him to be eating.

In verse 10 (and 14), the return time is specified as "in the coming year when you (pl.) shall be revived." Ishmael is with Sarah.

In verses 12 and 15, Sarah wonders (root חמח) in her heart. She talks of whether she can have pregnancies. Abraham is mentioned by name.

In verse 14, the question is whether anything can be hidden from before Jahweh.

Then there are several interpretative elements new with Ps.-Jonathan.

In verse 1, the place is called the תַּיָּזְרִי of Mamre, meaning a "look-out" position or perhaps, as Bowker would have it, a "crossroad."¹

In verse 3, the Shekinah is implored not to depart "until I have received these travellers."

Then, in verse 4, Abraham speaks to these men, instead

¹Cf. pp. 207 and 193.

of to the Shekinah.

In verse 5, Abraham encourages the visitors to give thanks to God for the meal.

In verse 8, mention is made that the boy prepared
תבשילין.

In verse 9, some manuscripts have he instead of they at the opening of the verse (as the LXX did).

In verse 10, the speaker is clearly identified as one of the three visitors. Later in the same verse, Ishmael takes note of what the angel said to Abraham.

In verse 11, the "way of women" is specified to be
סוכתא .

In verse 14, the speaker promises to return "at the time of the feast."

In verse 15, the phrase "for she was afraid" becomes part of Sarah's denial, "I did not wonder, for I was afraid." The angel reassures her in his reply.

In verse 16, we see that the angel who had spoken to Sarah went up to heaven while the other two went on to Sodom.

We can see that the tendency in Ps.-Jonathan is definitely to ascribe to the angels as much of the intercourse with Abraham and Sarah as is possible.

Let us review the Syriac Peshitta,¹ which has a few noteworthy items on our passage.

¹Eissfeldt, pp. 699-701, dates the Peshitta from 100-150 A.D. McNamara (The New Testament and the Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch, Rome, 1966, p. 51) cites five

In verse 1, the place is called the oak of Mamre.

In verses 1, 3, 13, and 14, the word for God is מריא .

In verse 4, the Peshitta puts the first two actions of Abraham in the first person singular, as Neofiti did.

In verses 10 and 14, the time for returning is "while she lives."

We can conclude that the Peshitta is fairly close to the MT, and has less interpretative material than many of the Targums in regard to our passage.

In the Samaritan tradition we have a version of the Pentateuch and a Targum.¹

In the Samaritan Pentateuch the principal difference from the MT is that in verse 3 אדני is taken as a plural (my lords) and all the other personal modifiers in the verse are

authors who believe that the Peshitta to the Pentateuch was made from texts close to our Palestinian Targum traditions, as well as one opponent of this theory. Sperber, vol. 4B, p. 415, says "The Peshitta belongs to the same family of Aramaic Pentateuch-translations as the so-called Targum Onkelos." On p. 416 he postulates that it represents an earlier stage than Targum Onkelos of Targumic formation. Roberts, pp. 214-223 gives a general background and presents arguments for and against Jewish provenance. For text see Vetus Testamentum Syriace, S. Lee, ed. (American Protestant Missionary Society, 1914).

¹Eissfeldt, p. 695, sets the date of the Samaritan Pentateuch as 400 years older than the MT, taking the MT at 100 A.D. It is often close to the LXX. Roberts, p. 188, agrees on the dating. For text see August von Gall, Der Hebräische Pentateuch der Samaritaner (Giessen, 1918).

For the Samaritan Targum, T. H. Gaster ("Samaritans," I.D.B., vol. 4, 190-197; here p. 196) dates it in the 4th century A.D. and notes that it is often similar to Onkelos. Roberts, p. 195, does not try to date it.

also in the plural. A most striking change, and one which forces us to keep our attention on the "men."

In verse 10, we see that Sarah was behind it/him.

The Samaritan Targum is more interpretative.

In verse 1, the location is the valley of Mamre (so Onkelos).

In verse 3, consistent with the Samaritan Pentateuch, those addressed are called רַבָּנִי, with the subsequent shift of the rest of the personal modifiers in the verse into the plural.

In verse 6, Abraham rushes to Sarah, who is at her mixing bowl.

In verse 10, we see that Sarah was behind it/him.

כעת חיה becomes כיומה קיומה and כזבן קעים in verses 10 and 14, respectively.

In verse 12, we see that Sarah doubted within herself (root קטרב from Greek καταγορεύω). The word, according to Jastrow,¹ means to denounce or bring charges against someone. The other Targum which had strong language here was Onkelos.

In verses 13 and 15, Sarah wonders (root חמה).

¹Page 1347, on noun forms.

APPENDIX II
JEWISH TRANSLATIONS AND TARGUMS
OF GENESIS 32, 23-33

In this appendix we will present observations on the ancient versions and Targums in a more detailed fashion than was the case in the synopsis and chart of Chapter III.

The LXX varies in minor ways from the MT and has an important change in v. 29. We will examine the more noteworthy cases here.

In v. 24 $\delta\lambda\epsilon\beta\eta$ is not a causative form as is ויעברם .¹ In v. 25 Aquila and Symmachus use forms of $\mu\upsilon\lambda\acute{\iota}\nu\omicron\omega$ and $\mu\omicron\nu\acute{\epsilon}\omega$, which convey the meaning of rolling in dust or raising dust. They are thus closer to the literal meaning of ויראבק than the LXX $\epsilon\pi\acute{\alpha}\lambda\alpha\lambda\epsilon\nu$.

In v. 26 $\epsilon\nu\acute{\alpha}\rho\kappa\eta\sigma\epsilon\nu$ is not exactly like the MT והקח .

In v. 29 the LXX has ". . . for you have prevailed with God, and you are strong with men." Further, Wevers notes several manuscripts which add $\epsilon\sigma\eta$, thus giving a future meaning to the second part, "you will be strong with men."²

¹Wevers notes several LXX manuscripts with causative verbs.

²Aquila and Symmachus use forms of $\acute{\alpha}\rho\chi\omega$ for והרית ; we have no evidence of how they rendered the rest of the verse.

In v. 31 פניאל is translated as $\epsilon\lambda\delta\omicron\varsigma \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$, which plays nicely with the following verb $\epsilon\lambda\delta\omicron\nu$.

In v. 32 פנואל is translated as $\tau\omicron \epsilon\lambda\delta\omicron\varsigma \tau\omicron\upsilon \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$, thus making it slightly different from its counterpart in the preceding verse, much as in the MT.

In v. 33 the LXX seems to ignore the noun הַנִּשֵּׂה, using instead the verbal phrases $\delta\epsilon \epsilon\omega\acute{\alpha}\rho\chi\eta\sigma\epsilon\nu$ and $\kappa\alpha\lambda\epsilon\omega\acute{\alpha}\rho\chi\eta\sigma\epsilon\nu$.¹

Turning to the Targums, let us look first at the interpretative remarks of Neofiti.

In v. 25 the opponent is identified as "the angel Sariel in the form of a man." Here and in v. 27 the dawn is referred to as the "column of dawn."

In v. 27 the angel asks to be released because "it is time for angels from on high to praise, and I am a chief of the praisers."

In v. 29 the angel renames Jacob Israel because "you have assumed superiority (אתרברבת) with angels from before God and with men, and you have prevailed against them."

In vv. 31 and 32 the place is called פניאל. Jacob (v. 31) called it this, saying "I have seen angels from before God face to face."

The changes in Neofiti clearly confine the encounter of Jacob to a wrestling bout with an angel.

The Fragmentary Targum has parts of vv. 26 and 27 of

¹Could the LXX interpreters have been reading the verb נִשֵּׂה, meaning "to forget"?

our Chapter. In v. 27 the opponent asks for release by Jacob because "the hour comes for angels to praise." This is similar to Neofiti; another similarity is the use of the phrase "column of dawn" in this same verse.

Another Targum of the Palestinian family was edited by P. Kahle in 1930.¹ We shall refer to it as the Cairo Genizah fragments (abbreviating as C.G.). The C.G. is rather close to Neofiti.

In v. 25 the opponent is identified as an angel in the form of a man, although he is not named. The "column of dawn" phrase occurs again here and in v. 27. In v. 27 the angel explains that it is time for angels from on high to praise, and that he is a chief of the praisers.

In v. 29 the angel explains why he is giving Jacob the new name Israel, saying ". . . you have claimed superiority with holy angels from before God in the form of men, and you have prevailed over them." Here we lose not only "god" as a direct object, but also the "men" of v. 29 of the MT as a direct object.²

¹Masoreten des Westens II, 2, Texte und Untersuchungen series, vol. 4 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1930), pp. 10-11. This is also called the Palestinian Targum. John Bowker, The Targums and Rabbinic Literature, p. 21, considers these fragments to represent a recension of the Palestinian Targum different from the Fragmentary Targum mentioned above. B. J. Roberts, The Old Testament Texts and Versions, pp. 200-201, goes into more detail as to the dates of the manuscripts and the significance of them vis-a-vis Onkelos, Peshitta, etc.

²C.G. breaks off after v. 29, resuming at Gen. 34, 9.

Turning to Targum Onkelos, in v. 29 the wrestler's remark is "... you are great (אַתָּה גָּדוֹל) before God and with men, and you have prevailed." In v. 31 Jacob says that he has seen the angel of God face to face. This is the first explicit mention of an angel at Jabbok in the Onkelos passage.

Targum Ps.-Jonathan has several new elements of interpretation combined with the previous Targumic traditions.

In v. 25 Jacob's opponent is identified as an angel in the form of a man. This angel then says to Jacob, "Did you not speak¹ for a tenth of all your possessions?² Behold, you have twelve sons and a daughter and you have not tithed them." Jacob then set aside his daughter and his four first-born sons, which left him with eight sons. He counted the eight, starting with Simeon, and, on recounting two to reach a total of ten, he came to Levi last. The angel, now identified as Michael, accepted Levi and presented him in prayer to God. These events kept Michael at the river until the coming of the column of the dawn.

In v. 26 Michael, in wrestling with Jacob, noticed that he did not have the power to seriously harm Jacob; so he dislocated Jacob's thigh.

In v. 27 Michael points out that it is time for angels to praise the Lord of the world, and that he is one of the

¹I.e., promise.

²Apparently referring to Genesis 28, 22.

praising angels. He further notes that "from the day of the creation of the world my time to praise has not occurred until now."

In v. 29 Michael says to Jacob, ". . . you have assumed superiority with angels of God and with men, and you have prevailed over them." In v. 31 Jacob says that he saw angels of God face to face.

In v. 32 we find a strange remark; "The sun rose on him before its time (which had set because of him before its time when he had gone out from Beersheba)."

In v. 33 we are reminded that Jews do not eat the sinew which moves up on the hollow of the thighs of cattle and of wild animals. They do not eat this because the angel had touched and held the hollow of Jacob's right thigh, in the place where the sinew moves up.

The Peshitta has a few interesting variations. In v. 23 לֹא־עָבַר is an Afel form, while the MT וַיַּעֲבֹר is simply a Qal form. Also the location is called a מְדִבְרָא.¹ In v. 29 Jacob is told that he had been strong with God and a man. In v. 31 Jacob says that he had seen an angel. In vv. 31 and 32 פְּנוּאִיל is used.

We should also look briefly at the Samaritan Pentateuch and Targum. In the Samaritan Pentateuch the spelling פְּנוּאִל occurs in both vv. 31 and 32. In the Samaritan Targum,

¹Possible misreading of מַעֲבֵר?

at v. 29, we have the statement that Jacob had striven with
 God אֱלֹהִים¹ The spelling פִּנּוּאֵל occurs in both vv. 31 and
 32.

¹This is from Adolf Brüll Das Samaritanische Targum zum Pentateuch (Frankfort: 1875), which is written in Hebrew script. The Samaritan Targum edited by H. Petermann and C. Vollers in Pentateuchus Samaritanus (1872) has עֵם אֱלֹהִים וְעֵם אֱנֹשָׁה, and notes in its apparatus instances of the ו being absent from וְעֵם. Petermann also notes that the Samaritans did not properly distinguish gutturals in Hebrew and Aramaic in pronunciation, and did exchange them in writing. Thus it is possible to explain Brüll's manuscript reading אֱלֹהִים as a variant for עֵם. All the information from Petermann and Vollers' book was made known to me in personal communication with Msgr. Patrick Skehan of Catholic University, Washington, D.C. (since I cannot read Samaritan script). The Peshitta reading of v. 29 is very close to that of the Targum of Petermann and Vollers.

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VITA

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The next year was spent in an M.A. program in Biblical Hebrew at Catholic University, Washington D.C., in preparation for subsequent doctoral work at Union Theological Seminary. Since September, 1977, he has been a member of the Department of Theological Studies of Saint Louis University, teaching both undergraduates and graduate students in the Biblical Languages and Literatures program there.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research in the history of ancient biblical commentary was not only to collect insights from the ancient Jewish and Christian writers, but also to search for some of the basic theological and hermeneutical presuppositions which guided their approach to the Scriptures.

In order to avoid basing conclusions on too small a collection of ancient commentary, I chose two passages instead of one and surveyed Jewish material up to and including the Yalkut Shimoni and Christian material up to and including Venerable Bede.

At the outset of Chapter One an analysis was made of Early Jewish Hermeneutic in Palestine by Daniel Patte. This author proposed several hermeneutical presuppositions which were held by the ancient Rabbis. The first and third chapters of the dissertation became virtually a test of Patte's proposals. At the start of the second chapter some guidelines were taken from works of J.Daniélou, G.Lampe, and K.Woollcombe in order to better deal with ancient Christian material.

Chapter One dealt with ancient Jewish commentary on the Genesis 18 account of God and the three angels visiting with Abraham at Mamre. Many of the extra touches found in the Targums were explained at greater length in later sources. The great majority of the Jewish commentary focused on Abraham's hospitality as a virtue that we should imitate. Some Jewish writers artfully related this passage to circumcision and Passover themes. There were relatively few applications or actualizations drawn from the story for later generations, but the story was frequently

related to its larger Genesis and Pentateuch contexts.

In Chapter Two we found that most of the Christian Fathers assumed Jesus had been present at Mamre in a pre-incarnate state. In spite of this popular explanation, very few aspects of the Mamre story were made into types of Christ's later incarnate life on earth. The main burden of Christian commentary involved incidental typology and spiritual allegory after the manner of Philo of Alexandria. Some typology of the life of the Church was found; John Chrysostom exemplified well here both the Antiochean tendency to avoid allegory and also the Christian ecclesial understanding of Abraham's hospitality as charity or almsgiving. Christian writers tended to ignore or only briefly reflect on the larger Old Testament contexts within which the Mamre story should be placed.

In Chapter Three we went to the Genesis 32 story of Jacob's night trial at the Jabbok. Jewish writers consistently held the opponent who wrestled with Jacob to be an angel. Jacob's courage was held up as an example to later generations. Many vivid accounts of the wrestling match were put forth and larger contexts were mentioned often. Kosher regulations regarding the sciatic nerve in beef and lamb dishes constituted the principal actualization of the story.

In Chapter Four we found Christians asserting that Jesus was present at the Jabbok, yet failing to draw many parallels with the later incarnate life of Jesus. While there was a fair amount of spiritual allegory drawn from the story, we found very little interest in either the particularity of the account or in its literary contexts.

The findings in the four chapters confirmed the presuppositions and

patterns proposed by Patte, Daniélou, et al. The ancient commentators also afforded us many good examples of constitutive hermeneutic, i.e., hermeneutic which encouraged believers to greater faith or to the practice of virtues. By and large the Rabbis were much bolder in their style and methods and were much more able to deal with small details in the passages than were the early Christians.

Hopefully historical studies of this sort, while they may not directly advance specific exegeses, will help students training for the ministry to come into deeper contact with the history and with the task of biblical hermeneutics.